Imam Muhammad Shirazi

HUSAYN
The sacrifice for mankind

Translated by
Z. Olyabek

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Some of the sayings of Imam Husayn

The following are some of the sayings of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* on occasions leading to the tragic event of Ashura – 10th of Muharram – 61 H, around 681 CE:

'Death with dignity is better than life with humiliation.'

'I do not see death except happiness and prosperity, and life with oppressors but anguish.'

'I swear by God, I shall not surrender as a humiliated person, and shall not escape like slaves.'

'I have not arisen for the purpose of exuberance, arrogance, corruption, or oppression, but I have done so in order to seek reform in the nation of my Grandfather [Muhammad peace be upon him]. I want to promote virtue and prohibit vice, and I want to go down the path and tradition of my Grandfather [Muhammad peace be upon him], and the path of my father [Ali ibn Abi Talib peace be upon him].'

Addressing his adversaries on the battlefield, when he was the only fighter left alive, and they started attacking the women and children in the tents:

'If you do not believe in a religion, and do not fear the hereafter, then be free (from arrogance) in your lives.'

'O Allah! You know that all there was from us was not in competition to seek power, nor to gain refuse of the world[1]*, but it was nothing other than to present the signs and essence of Your religion, and to promote reform in Your land, (so that) oppressed members of your servants find safety and security, and Your laws, orders and obligations are acted upon.'*

[1] *(i.e. wealth)*

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Some of the general sayings of Imam Husayn

'Say not about your brother in his absence other than that which you would like him to say about you in your absence.'

'There are those who worship Allah out of desire (for reward), and this is the worship of traders, and there are those who worship Allah out of fear (of punishment), and this is the worship of slaves. Whereas certain people worship Allah out of gratitude, and this is the worship of the free, and this is the best of the worships.'

"(O Allah) . . .

How can You be reasoned about with that that is in need of You in its existence?

Does anything other than You have a manifestation which You do not have, so that it can act as manifestation for You?

When were You ever not present so that You may need a guide (evidence or reason) to lead to You?

And when were You ever distant (from anything) so that the signs and the effects were the lead to You?

Blind is the eye that does not see You . . . . ."

'(O Allah) . . . What did he find he who lost You? And what did he loose he who found You? Truly he has failed who is contended with other than You.'

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What they said about Imam Husayn

Charles Dickens

"If Husayn fought to quench his worldly desires, then I do not understand why his sisters, wives and children accompanied him. It stands to reason therefore that he sacrificed purely for Islam."

Thomas Carlyle

"The best lesson which we get from the tragedy of Karbala is that Husayn and his companions were the rigid believers of God. They illustrated that numerical superiority does not count when it comes to truth and falsehood. The victory of Husayn despite his minority marvels me!"

Dr. K. Sheldrake

"Husayn marched with his little company not to glory, not to power or wealth, but to a supreme sacrifice and every member of that gallant band, male and female, knew that the foes were implacable, were not only ready to fight but to kill. Denied even water for the children, they remained parched under a burning sun, amid scorching sands yet no one faltered for a moment and bravely faced the greatest odds without flinching."

Brown

in his "A Literary History of Persia" writes:

"As a reminder, the blood-stained field of Karbala' where the grandson of the Apostle of God fell at length, tortured by thirst and surrounded by the bodies of his murdered kinsmen, has been at any time since then sufficient to evoke, even in the most lukewarm and heedless, the deepest emotion, the most frantic grief and the exaltation of spirit before which pain, danger, and death shrink to unconsidered trifles. Yearly, on the tenth day of Muharram, the tragedy is rehearsed in Persia, in India, in Turkey, in Egypt, wherever a Shiite community or colony exists; ... As I write it all comes back; the wailing chant, the sobbing multitudes, the white raiment red with blood from self-inflicted wounds, the intoxication of grief and sympathy."

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Sir Muhammad Iqbal

"Imam Husayn uprooted despotism forever till the Day of Resurrection. He watered the dry garden of freedom with the surging wave of his blood, and indeed he awakened the sleeping Muslim nation. If Imam Husayn had aimed at acquiring a worldly empire, he would not have travelled the way he did[2]. Husayn weltered in blood and dust for the sake of truth. Verily he, therefore, became the bed-rock of the Muslim creed; *la ilaha illa-Allah* (There is no god but Allah)."

Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti

"He gave his head, but did not put his hand into the hands of Yazid. Verily, Husayn is the foundation of *la ilaha illa Allah*. Husayn is lord and the lord of lords. Husayn himself is Islam and the shield of Islam. Though he gave his head (for Islam) but never pledged Yazid. Truly Husayn is the founder of "There is no Deity except Allah."

Antoine Bara

in his "Husayn in Christian Ideology" writes:
"No battle in the modern and past history of mankind has earned more sympathy and admiration as well as provided more lessons than the martyrdom of Husayn in the battle of Karbala."

Mahatma Ghandi

"I learned from Husayn how to be wronged and be a winner."

[2] from Medina, in today's Saudi Arabia, to Karbala in Iraq, along with his wives, sisters and children and those of his companions who did not exceed one hundred.

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Foreword

Who was Imam Husayn, and why was he the sacrifice for the whole of humanity?

Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*[3] was the grandson of the final Messenger of Allah Almighty to humanity, the holy Prophet of Islam Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*[4]; the messenger who "has been sent as Mercy to the worlds" to paraphrase the holy Qur'an.

His father was Imam Ali *alayhis-salam*, the commander of faithful, who comes second only to prophet Muhammad in the excellent merits that he possessed; qualities such as piety, sincerity, charity, tolerance, vast knowledge, to name a few.

His mother was Fatima al-Zahra' *alayhas-salam*[5], the daughter of prophet Muhammad and, given her immaculate qualities and moral values that she possessed, the leading lady of the worlds.

After the death of his grandfather, father and brother Imam Hasan, Imam Husayn was in charge of protecting Islam, the Almighty's final Revelation to humanity, from deviation. It was 60 H (around 680 CE). It was the most crucial time in the history of mankind. The forces of evil have been amassing all their forces, skills and expertise for fifty years, and over this period, and through all the devious means, they had managed to achieve considerable gains, but not enough to totally obliterate the teachings of Islam and its Messenger. They needed one final big push, and this task was assigned to Yazid bin Mo'awiyah. Through threat and brute force, Yazid had managed to quell all the voices of opposition, except for one.

Husayn, the son of Imam Ali, being who he is, and the Imam (leader) of Islam and Muslims had one duty to discharge; the protection of the final revelation to mankind – and at any cost.

And this is exactly what he did. He stood up to protect the torch that was lit to guide mankind to the light of truth.

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[3] *alayhis-salam*, meaning peace be upon him. This invocation is made after the mention of the name of any of the twelve impeccable imams, out of respect.

[4] *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih,* meaning peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his pure progeny. This invocation is made out of respect and devotion after the mention of the name of the last Messenger of Allah.

[5] *alayhas-salam*, for feminine use, meaning peace be upon her, as above.

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He left Makkah for Karbala, along with his women and children. He was joined by his devout friends, along with their families. There were also those how did not share his stance to begin with, but when they heard his call they joined in. Even some Christians joined him in his struggle when they heard his message!

At Karbala he, along with his loyal companions of not more than 100, faced the army of Yazid of more than 100,000 (some reports put this figure at several times more).

For the task of protecting this torch he did not hesitate to pay everything he had. For this he gave his life, and those of his brothers, nephews, sons, from his son of early twenties to his infant baby son of few months. This is not to mention his most devout companions who paid similarly.

What Imam Husayn achieved through his sacred movement was to rekindle and revitalise the bearers of that torch, and by offering himself and his family and companions as a sacrifice, he kept alive the message that has been sent not just to the Muslims but to all of mankind. Through his remarkable sacrifices, Imam Husayn managed to change the course of history and the direction that mankind was heading for.

The articles in this work cover some aspects of the aims and objectives of Imam Husayn's movement, the difference between his strategy and that of his brother Imam Hasan in facing tyranny and despotism, the examples he set, and the lessons that are learnt from the events that led to Karbala, and its aftermath fourteen centuries ago. Besides, the benefits of his movement, the personality of Imam Husayn peace be upon him as reflected by the many hadith and teachings of Prophet Muhammad is also discussed.

The author has written a number of works about Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam,* whereas this book is a collection of lectures delivered by the author. Included in this work is an interview with a Christian scholar on the subject of the Husayni ceremonies, a number of *Fatawa* or decrees from the most eminent Religious Authorities or *Maraje',* as well as some questions and answers about the annual commemoration ceremonies observed by the Muslims around the world on the occasion of Ashura – the Day of Sacrifice for humanity.

Z. Olyabek
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Chapter 1: **Imam Husayn – a brief biography**

Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is the son of Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* and Fatima *alayhas-salam* the daughter of the holy Prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*. He was the second grandson of the prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih,* and he was the holy prophet's third caliph successor, after his father and brother Hasan *alayhis-salam*. Like his father and brother, he was the *Imam* (leader) of the people. [On instructions from Allah Almighty, prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* announced the twelve Imams[6] who would succeed him in leading the Muslim nation.] Imam Husayn is the father of the nine Imams who followed him in succession.

He was born in Medina on the third of the month of *Sha'ban,* in the third year after Hijra – 624 CE.

On the day of *Ashura*, while suffering from extreme thirst, he was brutally killed and his head severed by the swords of the army of Yazid-bin-Mo'awiyah on Saturday the tenth of *Muharram* in the year 61 after Hijra – around 681 CE – in Karbala, Iraq.

His son and successor, Imam Ali ibn[7] Husayn, Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* prepared his headless body, after being left in the field for three days, and buried him in the fields of Karbala, where his shrine stands today.

The holy Prophet has said in the praise of Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn *alayhum-as-salam*[8]*:*

"My two grandsons are the delights of my eyes."

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[6] Imam – literally meaning leader – and in the scope of this work Imam refers to one of the twelve *Ma'soom* (impeccable) *Imams* who in turn succeeded Prophet Muhammad after his death as appointed by him. The first of the twelve Imams is Imam Ali *alayhis-salam*, followed by his son Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam*, followed by Imam Hasan's brother Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, followed by nine Imams, all descendents of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. On instructions from Allah Almighty, Prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* appointed the twelve Imams beginning with Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* as his immediate successor and stated the names of all twelve imams, even though only three were born at the time. Translator.

[7] ibn, also written as bin or ben depending on relevant pronunciation, is Arabic for 'son of'.

[8] plural for *alayhis-salam*.

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"Hasan and Husayn are the leaders of the youth in Paradise."

"Hasan and Husayn are both Imams whether they rise up or not."

He was the most knowledgeable and the best worshipper among the people of his time. He would pray one thousand Rak'ahs every night like his father, and on many nights he would carry sacks of food to the needy, to the extent that the marks of carrying heavy sacks were clearly visible on his back after his death. He was very kind, had a great and forbearing personality, and was hard on those who disobeyed Allah.

When a Bedouin Arab came to Imam Husayn seeking help he recited the following poem for the Imam:

Disappointed will not be he who makes a request from you.

For you are generous and trustworthy and your father was the killer of the profligate and the corrupt individuals.

If it was not for the former (members) of your (family)[9], we would still have been in hell.

Then Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, while avoiding eye contact with the man, gave him four thousand gold coins (Dinars) and apologized to the man saying:

Take this for I apologise to you, and rest assure that you have my sympathy
For if I were in a different situation and I had more (money) to offer you, I would have given you far more.

Through his courageous revolution, the like of which there has been none in the world, he revived the Islamic Law and the religion of his grandfather, and furthermore he even revived the whole world until the Day of Judgment. He is the leader of the martyrs and the best among people after his elder brother.

Throughout his life the Muslims used to revere and adore Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, and used to see in him what they had seen in his grandfather, the Messenger of Allah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*. Their adoration for Imam Husayn was not just because he was the grandson of the prophet *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*, but also because he was the manifestation of the teachings of Islam and the conducts of the Messenger

[9] i.e. the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali, Lady Fatima al-Zahra, and Imam Hasan.

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of Allah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*, no one could fail to see examples of the highest moral qualities in his behaviour.

The holy Prophet has said in the praise of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*:

"Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn."

Chroniclers and historians have individually remarked that Imam Husayn was the manifestation of the best examples of noble manners and conduct, as well as his vast knowledge, which he inherited from the Messenger of Allah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*. His actions spoke before his words. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was humbly gracious and generous to the poor and those in need. He used to support what is right and fight what was wrong. People always noticed such attributes in his conduct and behaviour as perseverance, forbearance, and magnanimity. He was the most pious and God-fearing of all people of his time.

In his book *Master of the People of Paradise* Dr Ahmad Ashur says:

"If you browse through the pages of the *Sihaah* books you could not fail to come across many tens of hadith about the merit and superiority of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and the love of the Messenger of Allah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* for him."

In his book *al-Fusul al-Muhimmah* Ibn al-Sabbagh al-Maliki, quotes Anas ibn Malik who said, "I was with al-Husayn *alayhis-salam* when a servant entered and in her hand a bouquet of basil. She saluted al-Husayn and gave him the bouquet. Al-Husayn *alayhis-salam* said to her 'You are free for the sake of Allah.' I said to al-Husayn 'She gives you a bouquet of basil and salute you and you set her free?' He said *'This is how Allah has taught us! Almighty He says: "If you are saluted, salute back in a better way or return the same salute" and the better way is to set her free."*[10]

[10] At the time of the prophet *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* and the Imams *alayhum-as-salam* slavery was common in the society. One of the most important values in Islam is freedom and therefore it always aimed to gradually eliminate slavery from society. Therefore Islam encouraged people to set their slaves free, and many rewards are prescribed for setting a slave free. The Prophet and the Imams lead the way in this process in two ways. One was to set examples for the Muslims by buying salves and setting them free at the first possible opportunity. The second policy of the Imams was to buy as many salves as they could, educate them and then free them into society as free, well mannered, and responsible adults. In this way, this policy gave a good chance to a slave to attain his/her freedom, set an example for other Muslims to practice, and give less chance to those who wanted to see slavery ripe in society.

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In his Chronicles, Ibn Asaakir reports that Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* used to receive money (*Khums* and *Zakat*) from Basra and other destinations and he used to distribute the money between the poor and the needy there and then.

Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is best known for his revolt against the status quo. By that time the socio-political situation had deteriorated to an extreme and intolerable state, fundamental measures needed to be taken. The main aim and objectives of Imam Husayn's revolt, which are in fact the aim and objectives of Islam at any time and in any place, may be summarised as follows:

- To bring about a responsible community in order to implement and convey the message and teachings of Islam.
- To build an Islamic society which takes Islam as its sole source of reference.
- To rescue the Islamic civilisation from deviation.

This is because the Islamic Ummah (Community) suffered from various diseases in different domains:

- In the social domain it suffered widely from corruption, bribery, cheating, oppression, favouritism and nepotism.
- From the law and order point of view, the criminal was not being prosecuted, and therefore crime was ripe.
- From the ethical viewpoint, they had turned the moral values upside down.
- From the economic viewpoint, the ruling elite and their cronies monopolised the wealth of the nation.

For such reasons, and for the fact that the Muslims had remained indifferent to these issues to the extent that these had become the norm, that Imam Husayn rose against the injustice and corruption that was being conducted in the name of Islam.

In the course of his jihad in the cause of Allah, Imam Husayn was brutally beheaded and his body mutilated, alongside his sons, relatives, and some seventy of his followers. Furthermore the women and children, who were subsequently captured, including Imam Husayn's sisters Zaynab *alayhas-salam* and Umm Kolthoum *alayhas-salam* as well as Zayn-al-Abidin

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alayhis-salam, were taken as prisoners and paraded in towns and villages as villains.

And since then the movement of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* inspired the reform movements against despot rulers all over the world and the Muslims continue to reap the fruit of the event of Karbala and every year during the month of *Muharram* the memory of *Ashura* is commemorated with vigour by hundreds of millions of Muslims all over the world.

As it was mentioned earlier, Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was the third of twelve Imams who succeeded the holy prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*. On instructions from Allah Almighty, prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* announced the twelve Imams who would succeed him in leading the Muslim Ommah (nation). Although at the time of the prophet Muhammad, only the first three Imams were alive, however, the prophet *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* named all twelve Imams who have been appointed as the Ma'soom Imams or leaders[11]. The first caliph (successor) of the prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* whom he appointed to lead the Ommah after him was Imam Ali *alayhis-salam.* The prophet appointed Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* immediately after his last pilgrimage, in Ghadir Khum, and instructed the Muslims to pay homage of allegiance *(Bay'ah)* to Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* as the Imam and the leader of the Muslims, and commander of the faithful, *Amir-ul-Mu'minin,* which they dutifully did. Given the number of people present at the time, some reports put the figure at more than one-hundred-and-twenty-thousands[12]; it took more than three days for them to pay the homage of allegiance to Imam Ali *alayhis-salam*.

The names and titles of the twelve *Ma'soom*[13] Imams are as follows (year of birth given in brackets):

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[11] for example see "Yanabi' al-Mawaddah", p 529 by al-Qandozi al-Hanafi; "Fara'ed al-Semtayn", vol. p 132; "Ghayat al-Maram", p 743; Masnad Ahmad, hadith # 19944, 20000, 19875, 19884, 19887, 19892, 199101, 19914, 19925, 19944; Sahih Muslim, hadith # 3394, 3395, 3396, 3397; Sahih Bukhari, vol. 8, p 104 (al-Ahkam); al-Tirmidhi, vol. 2, p 35; Kanz al-Ommal, vol. 6, p 201; Mustadrak al-Sahihain, vol. 4, p 501

[12] See for example: "Tathkirat al-Khawas", by al-Sibt ibn al-Jwazi al-Hanafi, p 30; "al-Sirah al-Halabeyyah", vol. 3, p 257; al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah" by Zeyn Dahlan.

[13] *Ma'soom* (plural, *Ma'soomeen*) is an individual who has attained a state of perfection and self-discipline such that they are in total harmony with the will of Allah, and as such they are, for example, able to refrain from the slightest error or overlook the smallest matter. In Islam the *Ma'soom* individuals are fourteen; they are Rasulollah, his daughter Fatima al-Zahra', and the twelve Imams *alayhum-as-salam*. The 14 *Ma'soomeen* are also referred to as the

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1. Imam Ali, Amir-ul-Mu'minin *alayhis-salam*, (10 BH, 600 CE)
2. Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba *alayhis-salam,* (2 H, 623 CE)
3. Imam Husayn al-Shahid *alayhis-salam,* (3 H, 624 CE)
4. Imam Ali ibn Husayn, al-Sajjad / Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhis-salam,* (28 H, 649 CE)
5. Imam Muhammad ibn Ali al-Baqir *alayhis-salam*, (57 H, 676 CE)
6. Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq *alayhis-salam*, (83 H, 702 CE)
7. Imam Mosa ibn Ja'far al-Kadhem *alayhis-salam*, (128 H, 745 CE)
8. Imam Ali ibn Mosa al-Ridha *alayhis-salam*, (148 H, 765 CE)
9. Imam Muhammad ibn Ali al-Jawad *alayhis-salam*, (195 H, 810 CE)
10. Imam Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hadi *alayhis-salam*, (212 H, 827 CE)
11. Imam Hasan ibn Ali al-Askari *alayhis-salam*, (232 H, 846 CE)
12. Imam Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdi / al-Hujjah / Sahib al-Zaman *alayhis-salam* and *may Allah hasten his reappearance.*

The twelfth Imam, Imam Mahdi *alayhis-salam* is alive but 'hidden' from the views of the general public, and by the will of Allah he will reappear to fill the world with justice, after it has been overwhelmed by tyranny and injustice. Imam Mahdi was born in 255 Hijra, 868 CE, and he went into occultation when his father, Imam Hasan al-Askari was killed by the Abbasid ruler in 260 Hijra, 873 CE.

Ahl-ul-Bayt, meaning members of the house, as in the Qur'anic verse Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, and thoroughly purify you, O Ahl-ul-Bayt (Members of the House). [*33:* 33].

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Chapter 2: **The Distinct Roles of Imams Hasan and Husayn**[14]

It is reported that Rasulollah[15] *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* said, "Hasan and Husayn are both Imams whether they rise up or not[16]".

Introduction

(The roles of) Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn *alayhum-as-salam* were planned and devised by Allah Almighty, and in turn by Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih,* so they facilitate the salvation of generations to come until the day of judgement. This was not because they were simply two Imams and Caliphs [successors] of Rasulollah, for this is a forgone conclusion, but because these two Imams were two models and exemplars for every single individual who wanted to rescue their peoples and countries from the yoke of tyranny of the despots at whatever time they be and in whichever country.

A hadith is reported that Allah Almighty, via Jibra'el *alayhis-salam*, sent twelve "envelopes" to Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* each of which was sealed by the Almighty to be distributed to the twelve Imams. Each of these contained the instructions as to the Imams' roles and duties, which they needed to execute in turn. This is a short and known hadith that needs at least fourteen sessions to discuss certain aspects of each *Ma'soom* and circumstances of the environment he was living in, and how each Imam dealt with the situations he faced. Amongst these Imams are Hasan and Husayn *alayhum-as-salam*. Here we wish to briefly outline how precise the divine plan was and how perfectly the Imams executed the plan, and this is apart from the fact that they are *Ma'soom*, or according to our beliefs Imams and successors to Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*.

The conclusion that we want to arrive at is whether we can make use of the circumstances and conducts of these two Imams in accordance with the hadith that "al-Hasan and al-Husayn are two Imams whether they rise up

[14] Abstract of lecture by Grand Ayatollah Imam Muhammad Shirazi

[15] Rasulollah meaning the Messenger of Allah, is one of the titles of Prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*.

[16] What is meant by this hadith is that an impeccable Imam is leader for the Muslims under every and all circumstances and conditions; whether he officially assumes the office of leadership or not, or whether he revolts against a tyrant or not.

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or not"? That they are not only Imams – leaders – for their own times only, but they remain Imams or leaders for generations to come until the day of judgement. There are three topics that we need to consider:

1. How society produces tyrants?
2. The character and psychology of a tyrant,
3. How to counter the tyrant?

Society and the production of Tyrants

Those societies produce tyrants where reformists are few and weak and therefore fail to discharge their duties, while mischief-makers are actively ferocious. And under such circumstances naturally the villains take over the country and rule the people. On this basis Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* said,

"You should enjoin good and prohibit abhorrent, otherwise Allah shall empower on you the evil amongst you, then you would pray (for this evil to be alleviated) but your prayers would not be answered."

This is a logical and rational fact, since if the reformist is not proactive in his responsibilities and does not discharge his duties, society would degenerate and gradually turn into a pit of corruption, and under such circumstances who will come to power? Naturally of the wicked and the corrupt . . . {however you are like, as such you will be ruled by} Then if a wicked and a tyrant came to power and ruled the country, and you pray to Allah that he is removed, will those facts and circumstances change by this prayer? Of course not, and in the above-mentioned hadith Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* is clarifying two natural or universal laws. The universal law of how the tyrants come to power, and the law that prayers (alone) do not remove the tyrants from power. Both are universal laws, and here Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* is not outlining a (specific) Islamic law for us, nor is he informing us from the unseen, but any sound thinking individual (and Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* is the master of wisdom and intellect) would realise that the society in which reformists fail to discharge their duties, eventually and naturally a tyrant would take over the country, and he would impose his will and his rule over the people. And if a tyrant comes to power, it is natural that he would not be deposed by prayers alone, but by action as well as prayers, for each has its own role to play.

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Society of the Shaam province[17] before the Islamic conquest (around 620 CE) was highly influenced by Roman values, and the then Roman society was a corrupt and a decadent society, and perhaps these characteristics were some of the contributing factors to the fall of the Shaam province to the Muslim army that came from Arabia to introduce Islam to the people of the Shaam province. The victorious army headed back to Arabia after the apparent establishment of Islamic rule in the area. However since the Shaami society was influenced by those Roman values, and it had not adequately absorbed the teachings of Islam, it was ridden by ignorance and overwhelmed by corruption in its various forms; social, political, economical, moral and ethical, and therefore in such a society the corrupt had the upper hand and the reformists were a minority, if at all. Mo'awiyah and his son Yazid were the by product of such corrupt society, as they did not absorb the teachings of Islam, nor did they learn the manners of Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*, like Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn *alayhum-as-salam* had done in the holy city of Medina, where the government of Islam was established, and personally led by Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*. Thus a society that has not adequately absorbed Islam and the effect of reform is still superficial, would easily be manipulated by the likes of Mo'awiyah, and through fear or deceit would fall back to its old traditions and beliefs, i.e. corrupt Roman values. Hence the like of Mo'awiyah and Yazid managed to take over and hold on to the office of government, through enticement and/or threat.

To reflect the situation above, a poet states in this famous poem,

I do not know what happened to the Muslim men
Or how Yazid happened to be the king amongst them

How many (responsible) Muslims such as Abu Tharr al-Ghefari[18] were there in the Shaami society at the time of Mo'awiyah and Yazid? Mo'awiyah was fearful of Abu Tharr alone, since the Shaami society did not know the Islamic laws and values, and the former was afraid that the

[17] The Shaam province roughly covered today's Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, and its capital city was Damascus.

[18] Abu Tharr al-Ghefari was one of the most prominent companions of Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*, and he was known for his sincerity and honesty. He also became known for his frank and brave criticism of wrong actions or policies, and for his standing up to tyrant and despots rulers of his time.

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latter would turn things against him by presenting the Teachings of Islam as taught by Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* to the public.

It is like introducing Islam to a new city. Will that society be a deeply Islamic one? No. Only on the surface things may have changed, and when anyone comes along and falsely claims to know the way of Islam, they would follow him! And this is what Mo'awiyah claimed in the Shaami society.

A tyrant is born in a society, where the fundamental factor in nurturing him is the established corrupt social order of that society. In other words, whenever you see a tyrant is born in a country, you should know that there are fundamental factors for it, the first of which being the corrupt and decadent social proviso of that country.

On the other hand when a society is rich with reformist and responsible individuals, then it would be a field for growth of prosperity, reform and development, such that it would be impossible for a tyrant to be born in that environment.

The prophet showed the people the Islamic way {and what better is there than Allah's way} [*2:* 138], and it is then up to them to adhere to those teachings in order to reach their targets.

Needless to say, by reformist we do not mean he who preaches to the people to enjoin good and refrain from evil in a small religious society, but by reformist we mean he who can change and transfer things and stand up to tyrants.

Character and Psychology of Tyrants

The character of tyrants fall into two categories, we either have a sly and cunning tyrant or a slow-witted and stupid one, and the sign of the first kind is that he is deceitful in war, vile and despicable in peace, while the second is vicious and savage in war and irresponsible and disrespectful in peace. Using Mo'awiyah and Yazid as examples, Mo'awiyah being the son of two devious parents, Abu Sufian and Hind, he is deceptive and disingenuous, and this could be clearly be seen in his wars with Imam Ali and Imam Hasan *alayhum-as-salam*, where deception played major and important roles in Mo'awiyah's wars.

The example of the second category is Yazid the son of Mo'awiyah, and his savagery in war, as seen from unspeakable brutality in his war with

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Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. Of course his viciousness and savagery was not limited to that battle alone, as he displayed his barbarity and cruelty, and his total disregard for any value when he attacked the holy city of Medina and instructed his soldiers to do whatever they wanted to do. they committed the most gruesome atrocities, ranging from burning, looting, and destruction to killing the young and old, women and children, even the infant babies, as well as raping thousands of women, . . . and all that took place in the sacred city of Medina. Yazid also attacked the holy city of Mecca and in particular he ordered to destroy the Ka'bah and the Holy Mosque there, which the army torched by attacking it by mangonel or catapult. It is in this sense that one is considered savage and brutal in war, since the tyrant does not respect even the rules and regulations of engagement, or any other laws, ideas or understanding. And this is the meaning of *Taghut* (the Arabic word of Tyrant) not respecting nor distinguishing between anything. Hence they say in Arabic the *Tughyan* of fire (meaning the rage of fire) since the fire does not recognise the laws and values and dose not respect anything but burns everything in its path, and it does so without distinguishing one thing from another. This is the nature of Yazid in war, and in peace he does not hold or respect any value for anything. He did not use to have any respect for anyone nor for any right of the people, he used to keep company with monkeys, drink wine, and regularly commit adultery and incest. This was to the extend that one of them used to say, "we were fearful that it would rain stone on us since Yazid used to commit incest with the likes of his sisters and aunts".

These are the two categories of tyrants, and there is no third type to them.

Encountering the Tyrants

Allah Almighty foreordained Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* to encounter the first kind of tyrant, whereas He foreordained Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* to deal with the second type. The reformists throughout the world must therefore follow the example of Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* if they were faced with the like of Mo'awiyah, and to follow the model of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* if they were to deal with the like of Yazid.

So the essence of the noble hadith, "al-Hasan and al-Husayn are two Imams whether they rise up or not" is to point out how Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* should fight his opponent, and how to make peace with him. If Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* were not to make peace with Mo'awiyah, that would have been a failure on his part, since Mo'awiyah plays with two faces; one of peace and one war, and Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam*

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needed to be prepared for both tactics. If Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* were to engage in battle only, then this would have exposed Mo'awiyah's conduct in war only and it would not have depicted his conduct in peace. Similarly if Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* were to adopt peaceful measures only, this would not have exposed Mo'awiyah's conduct in war. Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* was careful in his plan to deal with Mo'awiyah, which was not only in accordance with the plan of Allah Almighty, but it was logical too – this is apart from the fact that he was Ma'soom and our belief that he was Imam who must be obeyed. Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* fought Mo'awiyah for a period of time to reveal the conduct of Mo'awiyah in war, and he made peace with him to expose Mo'awiyah's face and conduct in peace times.

If it were not for that, and if the Imam had fought him until death, the peacetime conducts of Mo'awiyah would not have become apparent; such conducts as ordering all speakers across the land to curse and swear at Imam Ali *alayhis-salam*[19] after every prayer. On many occasions Imam Hasan was present in the Mosque when the speaker or prayer leader, on instructions from Mo'awiyah, insulted Imam Ali *alayhis-salam*, while it was one of the conditions of the peace treaty between Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* and Mo'awiyah that Imam Ali should not be insulted. Another condition of the peace treaty was that Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* and his household as well as the followers of Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* should not be harassed and intimidated. But in reality they were constantly harassed and tormented, and denied their rights by Mo'awiyah and his regime. In fact it was during this peacetime that Mo'awiyah declared his famous statement in public that, "the treaty of al-Hasan and all its conditions are beneath my feet!"

All of these would not have become apparent if it were not for the peace Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* made with Mo'awiyah, it was this act of Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* that exposed Mo'awiyah before the masses.

If it were not for a reformist like Imam Hasan, the two faces of Mo'awiyah – his conducts in war and in peace – would not have been exposed.

Therefore Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* shall remain a role model for future generations who want to stand up to tyrants such as Mo'awiyah.

[19] Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* is the father of Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* and the immediate successor to Prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*, who was appointed to this post by the prophet on instructions from Allah Almighty.

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Throughout history and the future, tyrants like Mo'awiyah will come when there will be a need for reformists like Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam*, and as for tyrants like Yazid, we will need reformists like Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*.

Exposing the Savagery of Tyrants

The peace of Yazid was wine, aba-qays (his pet monkey), playing with dogs and monkeys, adultery and licentious, despising and disdaining all civil moral values. Chroniclers mention that when Mo'awiyah was very ill on his deathbed, Yazid did not give the slightest care about his father, and in a nearby village he was drinking wine and playing with his dogs. (This is recorded in Morawwij al-Thahab). He was unbothered about the entire situation, to the extent that he was absent from his father's deathbed, not giving any value to his father, or to his successorship, so the conduct of Yazid during peacetime had become well known to the people.

It was Yazid's war that needed to be exposed. One of the subtlest measures that Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* took was to send his cousin and representative Muslim ibn Aqeel alone to Kufa. Some people are very surprised by this action of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. They are also very surprised about another broad measure the Imam took which was inviting his companions to leave him if they wished, rather than gathering them - as military leaders would do in such circumstances. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* invited his companions to leave him up to the eve of Ashura. This may seem very odd at surface. "Does he want to fight a battle tomorrow with the support of only about seventy companions?" "Yes he does, he knows exactly what he is doing". In fact if he were to do otherwise, we would have asked, "Why Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* went into battle – with say 10,000 companions – when he knew that he was going to be killed in any case?"[20] The Umayyad government was strong and covered a vast area stretching from the former Soviet Union to the middle of Africa. It was this gigantic government that Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* decided to stand up against. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* wanted to fight the tyrant Yazid, and we said earlier that Yazid was

[20] This is given the fact that some reports state that the army of Yazid consisted of more than 100,000 men. So if Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* went into battle with the support of 10,000 companions he would be killed, and the savagery and barbarity of Yazid would not be shown, whereas when he went into battle with the support of some seventy companions he and his companions were killed but then Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* brought out the barbarity and savagery of Yazid.

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vicious and barbaric in war, immoral and untrustworthy in peace, such that it is clear and it does not need further clarification. In the process of exposing Yazid lies a lesson that must be noted. How to stand up to savagery and how does viciousness appear? Vicious savagery and brutal barbarity appears when the opponent numbers few, but it does not appear when there is a large and significant opponent standing before it. A poet states in his poem in al-Seyouti

and I fear the wolf
when I pass it by alone

Wolf is savage but when does its viciousness appear? It appears when you are alone on your own, but if you were with a group, the ultimate viciousness of wolf would not become apparent. If Imam Husayn had more than ten thousand fighters with him to fight the Umayyad, the latter would not be able to do what they did with Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and Yazid's viciousness would not have been exposed, even though Yazid would still have killed Imam Husayn and his followers. If Muslim ibn Aqeel had gathered one thousand men with him, ibn Zeyaad would not be able to hang Muslim upside down. It becomes apparent when the number of the reformist opponents is few, but if the number were high, this would strike fear in the heart of the tyrant. You can see how Yazid, twenty days after Ashura and before everyone present in his court, manoeuvred when he realized that many people have gathered around Imam (Zayn al-Abidin)[21] in his support. He said, I did not do this! (i.e. the savage killing of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and his family members and followers).

So Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* knew exactly what he was doing when he went to Karbala with so few followers and supporters. This was his plan, so that he could reveal every bit of savagery and brutality of the tyrant rulers. In future generations you the reformist may say that this despot is brutal and I cannot confront him. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* would say to you, if you see any brutality you can stand up against it, since I confronted a brutal tyrant and I resisted him. If it were not for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and the kind of action and stance he took, it would have been said, "perhaps if Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* had seen such brutality, he would not have resorted to confronting and resisting". But this is not the case. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* in a carefully devised plan, and with amazing precision, revealed all the brutality and savagery in

[21] He is the son and successor of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam.*

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the heart of Yazid. In doing so he became the leader and model for all those in future generations who would face a tyrant like Yazid.

Therefore the statement of Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*, "Hasan and Husayn are two Imams whether they rise up to lead or not" is not limited only in the sacred sense, and Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* does not only want to show that they are two pious Imams, with knowledge and wisdom so that we could learn the Islamic law from – even though this is true. Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* is also pointing to their distinct role they had to play. Some people are surprised why there are so few hadith about Fiqh[22] from Imams Hasan and Husayn *alayhum-as-salam*. Their role was not to expand on Fiqh, but facing up to the tyrants of these kinds. Imam Sadiq *alayhis-salam* had the role of teaching the Islamic Fiqh. Why? Because he was opposed in particular by those who used the tools of Fiqh. So the role of Imam Sadiq *alayhis-salam* was that of a Faqih, and he revealed his Fiqh knowledge.[23]

We stated earlier that we need at least fourteen sessions, so that in each session we can talk about the role of each of the Ma'soomeen *alayhum-as-salam* starting from Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*, and Fatima al-Zahra *alayhas-salam* through to the last of the twelve Imams *alayhum-as-salam*. In these sessions we could prove that how each one of the fourteen Ma'soomeen is a leader and teacher forever. That the role of the reformist in the future generations would be like that of Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*, or Fatima al-Zahra, or Imam Ali, or Imam Hasan, or Imam Husayn, or any other Imam until that of Imam Mahdi, *may Allah hasten his reappearance*. Therefore a reformist must follow the example of that Ma'soom whose role is similar to his, and any role or conduct the reformist may need, it should be according to this model, otherwise the reformist would be in the wrong.

We pray to Allah that he guides us to what He loves and pleases.

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[22] Fiqh is Islamic law or jurisprudence.

[23] Imam Sadiq *alayhis-salam* is the sixth caliph or successor of the holy prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*. In his role as the sixth Imam, Imam Sadiq taught extensively the various branches of Islamic sciences including Fiqh or Islamic law. It is recorded that at a given time he had more than four thousand students, one of was Abu Hanifa who went on to form "Hanafi" sect. Imam Sadiq *alayhis-salam* taught for more than forty years. Because of the detailed and numerous teachings presented by Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq *alayhis-salam*, and recorded by his trusted students, the Shi'a draw on those teachings rather than anyone other than members of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam*. For this reason the Shi'a are also referred to as Ja'fari after adhering to the teachings of Ja'far al-Sadiq.

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Chapter 3: **A Glimpse from the Ray of Imam Husayn**[24]

Allah Almighty states {Think not of those who are slain in Allah's Way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the Presence of their Lord}[25]

This noble verse in the holy Qur'an points to the state of those who are killed in the cause of Allah, and it emphasises that their 'life' continues even after being killed, and that they remain alive. So he who is killed in the cause of Allah, his life would not be terminated, but he remains alive and receives sustenance (from Allah Almighty).

Also just as there are categories in this material life, e.g. those who are happy and those who are not, such classifications also exist in the hereafter too.

And how can it not be, when we have martyrs who scarified their lives to uphold the Truth and the Oneness of Allah Almighty. With their blood they have led other's lives out of darkness and into light, so that future generations can receive and adhere to the teachings of Islam.

And what if he who sacrificed himself – as well as being a martyr whom Allah promised eternal life – was also a pillar of faith and one of the Imams of the Muslims and mankind, such as Sayyid-ul-Shuhada Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. What a great martyr he is, and an esteemed station he occupies! Addressing Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, his son and successor Imam Zayn al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* states, "and as for the Hereafter, it is luminous with the light of your face".

The Ma'soom Imam

If we want to get acquainted with the great personality of a Ma'soom Imam, it is necessary for us to refer to some of the hadith that elucidate the station of the Imam *alayhis-salam* in the view of Allah Almighty, as well as his creative and legislative position.

Commenting about the Qur'anic verse, {and he to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed a benefit overflowing}[26] Imam Sadiq *alayhis-*

[24] Abstract of lecture by Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Shirazi
[25] The Holy Qur'an, 3: 169.

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salam said; "(This is) obedience of Allah and gaining knowledge about the Imam".

Also commenting about the Qur'anic verse, {Say: "Do you see; if your water (supply) seeps away, who then can supply you with clear-flowing water?"}[27] Imam Kadhem *alayhis-salam* said, "If your Imam disappears from you, then who will bring you another Imam?"

In another hadith from Imam Ridha *alayhis-salam*, he said, ". . . the Imam is the trustee of Allah amongst His creation, His proof and evidence upon His servants, His viceroy on His land, the herald to Allah, the defender of the commandments of Allah . . ."

The Ma'soom Imam has been chosen by Allah Almighty to represent Him, since he has a significant position in the sight of Allah. The lofty station that the Ma'soom has attained is beyond our comprehension. Addressing the significance and superiority of the Ma'soom Imam, Imam Ridha *alayhis-salam* said, "who can attain the full knowledge and understanding of the Imam, or who can choose an Imam? How impossible! The intellects went astray, the minds were confused, the eyes were blurred, the great men were belittled, the wise were bewildered, the eloquent failed to describe one aspect of his characteristics, or one virtue of his many virtues, and admitted their failure to do so, . . ."

So through these noble hadith and many more like them, it is possible for us to appreciate certain aspects of the personality and station of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, and his closeness to Allah Almighty, and his role in leading and guiding the community of mankind. Thus if we wanted to reach the divine mercy, and attain the bliss and felicity of this world and the hereafter, then we must certainly follow the foot steps of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam,* move according to the course he devised for future generations with his pure blood. Of course the same is true for other Ma'soomeen *alayhum-as-salam*, but here we are talking about and focusing on Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*.

Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is distinguished amongst other martyrs and revolutionaries by characteristics that excel all other martyrs; he became the master of all martyrs – from the first to the last – and this is not because he is a Ma'soom Imam, nor is it because he is the grandson, and the beloved one of Rasulollah (the Messenger of Allah) *salla-llahu-alayhi-*

[26] The Holy Qur'an, 2: 269.
[27] The Holy Qur'an, 67: 30.

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wa-aalih, but it is because of the majesty of the aims for which he started his revolution, the immensity of the sacrifice that he offered, and the perfection he achieved in various dimensions. This is why the particular emphasis is made by Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* on establishing and upholding the Husayni Sha'a'er[28], and the salute and visitation of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*.

Hadith on the Virtue of Imam Husayn

There are many hadith about the station and position of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* is reported as saying, "he who want to see the one inhabitant of the Earth who is most beloved by the inhabitants of the skies, he should look at Husayn".

Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* is also reported as saying, "Truly Husayn is one of the gates to Paradise; he who opposes him, Allah would deny him even the scent of Paradise".

Perhaps only this hadith is sufficient so as not to mention any more hadith about the station of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*.

There are many hadith narrated from the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* with regards to establishing the Husayni Sha'a'er. Imam Sadiq *alayhis-salam* is quoted as saying, "He whose eyes fill with tears when we are mentioned to him, Allah would bar his face from fire (of Hell)". And can you imagine what would be the reward for he who weeps for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, who is *Sayyid-ul-Shuhada* (Master of the Martyrs) and *Qateel-al-'Abarah* (the murder victim who brings tears to the eyes).

Imam Mahdi *may Allah hasten his return* in his salute – known as *Zeyart Nahiyah* – to Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* declares,

"Peace be to he in whose *torbah* (the soil of the burial site) Allah has made the cure (for every disease),

Peace be upon he under whose dome prayers are answered,

Peace be upon he whose descendents are the Imams, . . . "

From the above alone, only the first statement is sufficient (his *torbah* being cure for every disease) to show the divine miracle in the matter, and

[28] Sha'a'er means programs of commemorations.

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if this proves anything it points towards the position and station of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*.

Companions of Imam Husayn

One other aspect that distinguished the movement of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* amongst other movements throughout history is the distinguished virtue of his companions, who were martyred alongside him, to the extent that Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* said,

"I do not know of companions and family members more faithful and devoted than my companions and family members"

One of the greatest of the martyrs of Karbala is Abul-Fadhl al-Abbas *alayhis-salam*, the son of Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* and his mother is Umm-el-Baneen. Abul-Fadhl has many virtues and qualities, and has shown many miracles, which point to his station, and closeness to Allah Almighty. Imam Zayn al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* has said about al-Abbas *alayhis-salam*,

"May Allah have Mercy upon my uncle al-Abbas ibn Ali, for he favoured his brother over himself, showed extreme courage, and sacrificed himself for his brother, such that both of his hands were cut off. Thus Allah replaced them with two wings, with which he flies with the angels in Paradise, just as He gave Ja'far ibn Abi Talib. In the Sight of Allah al-Abbas has a station and position that all martyrs would envy on the Day of Judgement."

Furthermore, al-Abbas *alayhis-salam* is known as *Baab-al-Hawa'edge* or the "Gate of Needs" to Allah Almighty, and this in itself is a manifestation of martyrs being alive by their Lord, such that people use their Light after their martyrdom, and the people plead to them to fulfil their needs.

The Day of Ashura

There are days that are turning points in the course of history and in the direction of life on Earth, and one of the most important of those days is the day of Ashura. Just as the 27th of Rajab – the day of *Mab'ath* or First Revelation to Prophet Muhammad – forever changed the course of history and life on Earth, and just as Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* planted the seeds of Islam and Iman in the hearts of the people, the day of Ashura and the sacrifice of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* returned Faith or

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Iman to the hearts of the people and restored the image of Islam which the evil hands tried to distort and destroy.

When the pagans of Quraysh asked Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* to forego his mission and his call for the oneness of Allah in exchange for all that he wished for in terms of wealth and position, Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* replied,

"By Allah if they were to put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, for relinquishing this cause, before Allah establishes it or I die, I would not abandon it".

Just as Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* showed his resolve and steadfastness in his mission, Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* manifested his resolve on a number of occasions in Karbala, which would never be forgotten by the passage of time. For example at noontime on the day of Ashura, one of the companions said it is prayer time as it is now noontime, Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* said, "Yes it is", and he led the noon prayers, despite the raging battle and the ferocity of his enemies. Thus at the most pressing and dangerous times Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* did not relinquish even one of the obligations of Allah Almighty, and he took this stance to emphasise the importance of protecting the sanctity of the divine obligations, establish and uphold the Islam and its laws and teachings. In the Zeyarat (Salutation) of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* one reads, "I hereby testify that you upheld the prayers, paid the Zakat, enjoined on good, and forbade evil". The day of Ashura is the day that teaches us how to straighten and perfect our way of life in this world, and how to match it to the Syrah or the way of life of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, who sacrificed everything he had for the sake of Enjoining Good, Forbidding Evil, and upholding the duties of Islam, implementing its teachings, and adhering to Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam*.

The Torch of Guidance and Ark of Salvation

It is reported that on one occasion Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* entered into a room where Prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* was present, and the latter welcome him by saying, "Welcome to you O Aba-Abdillah, the beauty of the heavens and earths". It was said to the Prophet, "How can anyone other than you be the beauty of the heavens and earths?" Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* replied, "by He who sent me as a messenger, Husayn is greater in the heavens than he is on earths. And it is

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written on the right of the *'Arsh "Throne"*[29] that, "Husayn is Torch of Guidance and Ark of Salvation", and then Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* took the hand of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and said, "O people! This is Husayn son of Ali, so glorify him and favour him (over others) Just as Allah has favoured him, for by He in whose hand is my soul, his place is in the heavens, and the place of those who love him is also in heaven, and the place of those who love them is also in heaven."

Imam Sadiq, *alayhis-salam* said, "My (grand) father is *Qateel-al-'Abarah* (the murder victim who brings tears to the eyes). The Imam was asked what is *Qateel-al-'Abarah?* The Imam replied, "He (Imam Husayn) is not mentioned to a believer, unless he weeps for him."

The Choice of Allah

Imam Husayn used to say, "I want to enjoin good, and forbid evil, follow the teachings of my grandfather (Rasulollah) and that of my father Ali ibn Abi Talib, . . .". He wanted to take the Ummah (the Muslim Community) from Evil to Good, and put a stop to Evil, he wanted to rescue the Ummah from the low and miserable state they had settled in to honour and glory, and this after the Muslim Ummah had accepted this deteriorated condition, symbolised by its state of apathy, reliance on worldly matters, its silence to oppression, and therefore the domination of tyrants such as Yazid and his father and their likes over the realm of the Ummah. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* wanted to spread and disseminate the spirit of Iman - commitment and conviction - and Truth in amongst the Ummah so that it could awaken once again; just as it was in the days of Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*. For it was clear to him that the religion (of Islam) was being distorted and deviated and he wanted to restore it afresh.

This is how Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* became the Torch of guidance, and Ark of salvation, and this is how he became the Choice of Allah Almighty. It is reported from Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* that Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* said,

"When I entered paradise[30], I saw written on its door with gold, there is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Beloved One of Allah, Ali is *Waliy-*

[29] *'Arsh* is the symbolic "Throne" of Allah in the heavens, just as the Ka'bah in the holy city of Makkah is referred to as the "House" of Allah.

[30] . . . during one of many *Me'raaj* (Ascension to the heavens) that Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* made.

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ullah, Fatima is *Amatullah*, Hasan and Husayn are the Choice of Allah, and upon he who hates them be the Curse of Allah."

Adherence to the Choice of Allah, and using the light of this Divine Torch, will bring guidance in this world and salvation in the hereafter. This is because the love of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is associated with good deeds, he is a torch who shows the path of the Truth to those who seek it, and since by his sacred movement he – *alayhis-salam* – discriminates between the path of Truth and the path of Falsehood. In his well-known declaration on the day of Ashura, he states,

"If the religion of Muhammad were not to stand except by my killing, O swords! Take me".

Furthermore, Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is also the fifth member of the *As-hab al-Kissa*, about whom the Purification verse was revealed; in the statement of the Almighty:

{Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, *Ahl-ul-Bayt* (Members of the Household), and to make you pure and spotless.}[31]

So by the evidence of the Qur'an, he is from the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam.* Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* said,

"To love me and my Ahl-ul-Bayt is valuable and beneficial on seven occasions: whose fears are immense; at the time of death, in the grave, at the time of resurrection, at the (time of evaluating one's) Book of Deeds, at the time of questioning, and at the time of weighing (one's deeds of good verses evil)".

Truly Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is a Torch of guidance, and his light continues to shine upon us with goodness and blessing; for it distinguishes the path of the Truth from Falsehood at all times and ages, this is in addition to the perpetual presence of his light in his Ma'soom descendent – in the manifestation of his grandson Imam Mahdi *may Allah hasten his reappearance.* In acknowledging the momentous sacrifice Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* made, and the colossal trial and tribulation he faced on the day of Ashura, Allah Almighty fashioned the Imams – who are the protectors of Islam – in amongst his descendents.

[31] The Holy Qur'an, 33: 33.

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The Severed Head of Imam Husayn

One of the miracles that Allah Almighty gave to Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was that his sacred severed head spoke as it was being carried from Karbala – in Iraq – to Shaam – modern Syria – and back to Karbala where it was buried in the grave where his sacred body had been buried. As reported by numerous chroniclers and recorded in many history texts, in the course of the entire passage of the women and children captives, with which the heads of the martyrs of Karbala were also carried from Karbala to Shaam and back, the sacred head of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* used to recite the holy Qur'an, and this phenomenon proved instrumental in guiding the people to Truth. The sacred head of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* also spoke in the court of the evil Yazid. When the sacred head of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* arrived at the court of Yazid, amongst others, the Roman envoy of the emperor of Rome was also present. After realising that the captives were the women and children of the household of the Prophet of Islam, and the head of the grandson of the Prophet was amongst them, the Roman envoy protested to and rebuked Yazid, and said,

"Had we had a descendent of Jesus amongst us we would have honoured him and glorified him".

In response to this protest Yazid ordered the Roman envoy to be killed immediately. The sacred head of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* said in a loud voice, "there is no power but that of Allah". At that occasion and at every other occasion throughout the journey from Karbala to Shaam and back, people were astonished to see and hear the sacred head of Imam Husayn speaking, and they realised that this was no ordinary event but a divine miracle, and Allah Almighty is showing them the realty of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. Such events revealed to the people the reality and the significance of the hadith stated by Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*,

"I leave behind two momentous weights, the Book of Allah and my descendents the Ahl-ul-Bayt"

the people realised that the truth is with Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* when they saw the miracle of his sacred head speaking or reciting the holy Qur'an.

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Conveying the Voice of Imam Husayn to the World

There are therefore certain duties that we must discharge with respect to the movement of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, some of which are:

1. We must present the movement of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, as well as his principles and aims to the world through modern media such as Radio and Television, books, internet, etc. in the way that Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* would want it. We must glorify the Sha'a'er which the *Husayniyahs*[32] facilitate commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. It is also desirable that the days of Ashura are declared public holidays and signs of sadness and mourning being publicly displayed. Imam Ridha *alayhis-salam* said, "even the *Jahiliyyah*[33] – the pre-Islamic era – used to regard Muharram as a scared month, thereby forbade war and fighting in it, whereas our sanctity was violated in this month! Our blood was shed, our dignity breached, our women and children were taken prisoners, our tents were torched; and all their contents looted, our dignity were not saved even for the sake of (our grandfather) Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih . . . ,* truly the day of Husayn wounded our eyelids[34], shed our tears, humiliated our revered one in the land of *Karb* (anguish) and *Bala'* (affliction), and you (O land of Karbala) have left us with anguish and affliction until the last day of this life. So for the likes of Husayn the weepers should weep, for crying and weeping destroys the great sins". Then Imam Ridha *alayhis-salam* said, "With the start of the month of Muharram, my father could not be seen smiling, every day his heartache and anguish would increase until the tenth day, which was the day of sorrow, grief and weeping; saying this is the day Husayn *alayhis-salam* was killed". Imam Ridha *alayhis-salam* is also reported as saying, "he who does not concern himself with his business and occupation, or seek to sort out his affairs on the day of Ashura, Allah Almighty would see to his needs in this world and in the hereafter, and he for whom the day of Ashura is the day of mourning and sorrow, Allah would make the Day of Judgement the day of joy and happiness, and he would

[32] Husayniyah is a religious centre where Husayni commemoration programs are held.
[33] Literally means ignorance, it refers to the pre-Islamic era.
[34] Meaning we wept blood.

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be pleased seeing us in Paradise. He who considers the day of Ashura the day of *barakah* - blessing and good fortune – and stores food stuff etc. in his house, on the day of judgement Allah would resurrect him and accommodate him at the bottom of hell with Yazid, Obaydullah ibn Zeyad, and Ommar ibn Sa'd – may the curse of Allah be upon them".

2. Just as Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* strived to implement the teachings of Islam and the laws of the holy Qur'an, so too we must follow in his footsteps and implement the teachings and laws of Islam throughout the Muslim land.

3. It is imperative upon us, wherever we may be, to hold programs for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, in the best possible manner, since the survival of Islam until the end of time is the aim which Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* died for. Islam shall remain alive by virtue of the blood of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and the blood of those who were brought up in his school, defending Islamic values and teachings, throughout history.

In short, commemorating the memory of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* by holding mourning programs of *Ta'ziah* in the days of Ashura, giving food on those days, etc. all of such programs help keep the memory of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* alive, and it is such programs that have protected the spirit of Shi'a[35] and adherence to the holy Qur'an and the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam*.

Imam Zayn al-Abidin and Ashura

Imam Zayn al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* also manifested the essence of this duty by his prolonged grief and weeping for his father. It is reported from Imam Baqir *alayhis-salam*, " . . . and he (Imam Zayn al-Abidin) wept for his father for twenty years, and every time he was served food and drink, he wept for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, until on one occasion his servant said to him, "Is your sorrow and grief not going to end?", Imam Zayn al-Abidin, *alayhis-salam* replied, "Woe unto you! The prophet Jacob had twelve sons, and (when) Allah made one of them disappear, his eyes

[35] Literally Shi'a means 'follower', and this term was first used by Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* when he referred to Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* by pointing to him and said, **"He and his *Shi'a* are the prosperous ones"** From then onwards the followers and devotees of Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* become known as the Shi'a.

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turned white (i.e. blind) because of his increasing crying for him, his head turned grey because of grief, and his back humped because of sorrow, and all this while his son was alive in the world. Whereas I saw my father, my brother, my uncle, and seventeen members of my family killed around me . . . so how can my grief and sorrow end?" It is reported that Imam Zayn al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* cried and wept so much for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* that it was feared that he would loose his eyesight. Every time he was given water to drink, he wept such that his tears poured into the water cup, and when he was asked about this, he replied "how can I not to when my father was denied the water that was absolutely free for the beasts and wild animals".

Ahl-ul-Bayt and Ashura

The Ma'soom Imams *alayhum-as-salam* annually held Azadari or mourning programs commemorating the day of Ashura, and in fact the Imams of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* encouraged others to continue to hold such programs to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* in various forms and styles of remembrance be it those which are obligatory, or those that are Mustahab or permissible, for this day is like no other day. There has been many hadith from them in this respect; in one narration Imam Sadiq *alayhis-salam* is asked as to why the day of Ashura became the day of sorrow and grief, lamentation and weeping, rather than the day when Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* died, or the day when Fatima-al-Zahra *alayhas-salam* died, or the day when Amir-ul-Mu'minin[36] *alayhis-salam* was killed, or when Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* was killed by poisoning? Imam Sadiq *alayhis-salam* replied, “Truly the day of al-Husayn is the day of the greatest catastrophe, since *As-hab al-Kissa* (people of the cloak) *alayhum-as-salam* who were the most honourable of creation in the sight of Allah were five, and when Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* died, Imam Ali, Fatima al-Zahra, Hasan and Husayn *alayhum-as-salam* remained, and the people sought solace and comfort in them, and when Fatima al-Zahra *alayhas-salam* died, people sought consolation and comfort in Amir-ul-Mu'minin, Hasan and Husayn *alayhum-as-salam*, and when Amir-ul-Mu'minin *alayhis-salam* died people sought solace and comfort in Hasan and Husayn *alayhum-as-salam*, and when Hasan *alayhis-salam* died people could find

[36] *Amir-ul-Mu’minin*, meaning the Commander of the Faithful, is the title that was exclusively awarded to Imam Ali *alayhis-salam* by Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*. Thus Imam is usually referred to as *Amir-ul-Mu’minin.*

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comfort in Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, but when Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was killed, there remained no other member of *As-hab al-Kissa* to seek solace and comfort in, and by the killing of the last of them all access to *As-hab al-Kissa* was severed, whereas so long as there was even one of them amongst the people, it was as if all of them were amongst the people. That is why the day of Husayn *alayhis-salam* is the most calamitous of all days."

Thus great rewards have been reported for establishing and upholding these Husayni Sha'a'er. Imam Baqir *alayhis-salam* stated, "Imam Zayn al-Abidin used to say, "Any believer who weeps for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and his tragedy such that his tears run down his cheek, Allah Almighty shall accommodate him in Paradise, and any believer who wept for us for what we suffered at the hands of our enemy in this world such that his tears run down his cheeks Allah shall accommodate him in a lofty station, and any believer who suffers hardship in our cause, such that he weeps for us and his tears run down his cheek, Allah Almighty shall repel from his face any anguish and protects him from fire on the day of Judgement".

And thus tyrants and despots throughout history tried to stop these sacred ceremonies and Husayni Sha'a'er, as is the case of the (Ba'thist) regime in Iraq. The regime first began by banning the mourning ceremonies in the capital city – Baghdad – and it then extended this ban to all other cities of Iraq. It then went on to ban the people Basra and other cities from coming to Karbala on religious occasions such as on Ashura and on the day of Arba'een.

The Ba'thist regime then gained enough courage and confidence to arbitrary arrest the Ulema, scholars, and public speakers of the Husayni Sha'a'er, and subject them to brutal torture, before executing great many of them. All of this is in aid of suppressing and killing the spirit and the will of the Ummah, which emanate from the religious and Husayni Sha'a'er.

This was a quick insight in the role of Sayyid-al-Shuhada *alayhis-salam* in protecting Islam, and a glimpse of his station in the sight of Allah Almighty, and lofty station and the eminence of the Imam in this world and in the hereafter, and how can it not be when he addresses Allah Almighty saying:

I have left the entire world for the sake of You
and I have orphaned my children so that I see You

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So if I am cut into pieces for the love of You
my heart would lean to none other than You

And these words reflect the extent of the sincerity of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* in his love for Allah, and his honesty in defending Islam.

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Chapter 4: **Upholding the Husayni Sha'a'er**

Introduction

Allah Almighty says in His Glorious Book:

{On that account, We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone slew a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole people, and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.}[37]

In some of the Tafsir (exegesis) it is stated that one of the meanings of "saving life" of the above noble verse is "leaving and exiting the darkness of aberration to the Light of being guided", as the Almighty states,

{Can he who was dead, to whom We gave life, and a Light whereby he can walk amongst men, be like him who is in the depths of darkness, from which he can never come out? Thus to those without Faith their own deeds seem pleasing.}[38]

So this noble verse considers he who is distant from faith – iman – to be distant from the light or the knowledge with which one lives amongst the people. Therefore the Light that is in fact knowledge or faith as presented in this noble verse is one of the meanings of "giving life".

This kind of giving life has many manifestations; one would be for individuals who are alive, i.e. to endeavour to guide someone to the right path. In Another case this "giving life" would be for individuals who are dead; for example in a meeting one might highlight the virtues and the good qualities of a *mu'min* – a believer – who is dead, this act would also be considered "giving life" to the individual concerned. The gatherings that are arranged on the occasions of the birthday or the death of the Imams *alayhum-as-salam* are also considered a manifestation of "giving life" to those occasions and to their respective owners. This "giving life" is no doubt considered as the Sha'a'er that Allah Almighty refers to in His Glorious Book:

[37] The Holy Qur'an, [*5:*22]
[38] The Holy Qur'an, [*6:*122]

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{And whoever holds in honour the Sha'a'er – Symbols – of Allah, for they truly reflect the piety of the heart.}[39]

In fact upholding and "giving life" to the Islamic occasions is one of the Sha'a'er that Islam calls for. So when highlighting the virtues of a believer means keeping his memory alive, it is far more significant when we attempt to keep alive the memory of Rasulollah and his Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam*. And this is clearly noticed in the tale reported in the holy Qur'an when Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *alayhis-salam* said,

{Grant me honourable mention on the tongue of truth among the latest generations}[40].

This means that "O Lord I ask to make the people after me remember me and keep my memory alive – "giving life to me" – so that my teachings and religion remain alive amongst the people – which are Tawheed and the law of Allah – and at the end of the day the religion that you revealed to me shall be the cause for the guidance of the people."

Benefits of the Husayni programs

In the same way the mourning programs have great importance and they may not be ignored, and the Husayni Sha'a'er have a significant role in revitalising the nations and no one can deny this fact. So too are the Qur'an recitation sessions, as the words of the Qur'an resonate in the hearts of the believers and occupy their entire existence such that the Qur'an verses become their aims and objectives. For the Qur'an rejects tyranny and oppression, or transgressing upon others' rights or suppressing their freedoms or sending them on exile. Allah Almighty states in His Glorious Book,

{Those who do not judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are the transgressors.}[41]

{And do not transgress for Allah does not like the transgressors}[42]

{Take not life, which Allah hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law.}[43]

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[39] The Holy Qur'an, [*22:*32]
[40] The Holy Qur'an, [*27:* 84]
[41] The Holy Qur'an, [*5:* 47]
[42] The Holy Qur'an, [*2:* 190]

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{Do the Unbelievers think that they can take My servants as protectors besides Me? Verily We have prepared Hell for the Unbelievers for (their) entertainment.}[44]

When the Muslims read such verses from the Qur'an, Allah opens their hearts and they realise that the reality (of their society and of their country and circumstances) is contrary to what the Qur'an calls for. It is for such reasons that the tyrants endeavour to prevent the Husayni programs, since these programs expose the criminals and reveal the truth to the people. I shall mention an account from history in this respect and then come back to our discussion.

Husayni Programs vs. Ploys of Colonialists

In one of the Indian cities where the Muslims used to lead a tranquil life, the British entered one of the Indian cities under the guise of a trade company. The local governor mobilised his forces to resist the British, but with all the efforts he made his forces were no match to the British forces. The result was that British quashed the resistance and killed many of the forces of the Indian governor. Then they issued a decree to kill the women and children, and the city was subjected to brutal massacre, and the bodies of the victims remained unburied for several days such that animals fed on them. In this way the British managed to rule Indian subcontinent. One of the laws they instituted was that they banned the Qur'an recitation sessions and Husayni Sha'a'er programs, whereas the Indian Muslims used to actively organise and participate in such programs. Under the new British law anyone who organises such programs is imprisoned for a period of ten years. However one of the scholars decided to actively oppose this 'law' and set up Qur'an lessons for the youngsters and encouraged parents to send their children to his Qur'an lessons. The man was charged for breaking the imposed law and imprisoned for ten years. On his release from prison, and with undiminished determination he continued his Qur'anic lessons for the youngsters, in addition to organising other lessons as well as Husayni Sha'a'er. The successes of his programs were such that similar programs were also set up in other mosques, and they became as widespread as before. Such programs have a direct role in uprooting tyranny from the Islamic countries and freeing them from the grips of the multinationals.

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[43] The Holy Qur'an, [*6:* 151]
[44] The Holy Qur'an, [*18:* 102]

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The significance of the mourning programs

As for the truths and validity (of the Sha'a'er), they are reflected in the realities we come across in our daily lives. One of the Maraje' in the holy city of Qum narrated to me an interesting account of his encounter with a Christian priest. He said, "When I was studying in Najaf (in Iraq), I once went to Baghdad with some of the fellow students. While there we heard that there is a priest who actively preaches for Christianity, so we decided to wear normal clothing (not the usual 'Aba and turban) and attend his session. At the end of the program, and when the people left the hall, the priest turned to us and asked us, "Who are you?" we replied, "we are native" he said, "I don't mean that, but it seems to me that you are scholars and I do not think you came here to learn from me." I replied that we study theology. I could tell that from the outset, he replied. In our conversation with him he said, "I shall admit to you a truth that someone else would not say it, and the truth is that your Prophet (*Salla-llahu Alayhi wa Aalih)* was a man of knowledge and reflection and was aware of reality- and in these qualities he was unparalleled and came second to no one. Furthermore, your Prophet left behind for you things that no other prophet left for his people, and if we had just one of those things we would have made the entire world Christian. The first of those things is the Noble Qur'an, which is the eternal miracle of Islam; the second of them, the descendants of your Prophet who are referred to as "Sayyid". They always continue to remind the people of the existence of the Messenger of Allah; the third of those is the existence of the shrines of the impeccable Imams as well as those of their of springs. These shrines act as a magnet and a focal point for the people, continually attracting them and giving them spiritual strength and guidance. The fourth of these things are the mourning programs that are established to commemorate them, and these programs are the best centres for making the people adhere to Islam. As you can see I have difficulty attracting followers of my own faith, whereas in your case as soon as you put a banner with "Ya Husayn" written on it, masses of people flock to your assembly."

The Husayni Sha'a'er, or the mourning programs carry significant importance, as well as the programs commemorating the birth of the Ma'soomeen *alayhum-as-salam*. One of the benefits of such programs is that the teachings of Islam with respect to all aspect of life are presented to the people, such as the question of government and leadership, the

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characters of the leader, his qualities and attitudes, etc. All such issues Islam has dealt with in details and the conduct of Rasulollah and Ma'soom Imams *alayhum-as-salam* reflect them. Now when such issues are presented and discussed during such programs, this does not go well with the plans of the despots and tyrants. When the characters of the Imams *alayhum-as-salam* are mentioned such as their bravery and the sacrifice they made for the sake of Islam, or encouraging the people to follow the Ahl-ul-Bayt and to have absolute trust in Allah and whole-heartedly adhere to the teachings of the holly Qur'an, or to fear Allah Almighty alone and no one else, or awakening the youth and encouraging them to follow those teachings. Such issues do not go well with the plans and policies of the tyrants who want to distance the people from Islam and their Islamic heritage, and to weaken their faith in Islam. They want to encourage non-Islamic or anti-Islamic values in societies instead of truthfulness, trust, sincerity and honesty, responsibility, strife, sacrifice, and adherence to the right path. For this reason the tyrant rulers are in perpetual war with mourning programs and the Husayni Sha'a'er. And everyone knows the clear role the Husayni Sha'a'er play in awakening the nation and boosting their morale, encouraging adherence to Islamic thoughts and teachings and calling the people to enjoining good, piety, cooperation, and upholding the cause of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*.

Recommendations for the Husayniyahs

1. To organise programs that emphasise the love and dedication of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* such that this love is out of awareness and understanding of the truth. The creation of love in the hearts is the responsibility of the Husayniyahs through the lectures and programs they organise which give vitality to the hearts and reduces one's attention to this world and encourages the individual to ascend through an elevated soul and with the teachings and thoughts of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam*.

2. To emphasise on the Noble Qur'an and to organise recitation sessions and classes for teaching the recitation of the Qur'an, especially for the children, since they are the strength of the future of Islam, and the same goes for the youth and women. It is imperative that everyone uses this unparalleled source of knowledge and to disseminate its teaching throughout society.

3. It is also important that programs are held to teach Islamic laws and acts of worship including all those matters that people come

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across in their daily lives, as well as *Aqa'ed* or Islamic beliefs, which are obligatory for everyone to know. Other issues should also be taught such the history of the Math-hab and the lives of the holy Imams and their struggles against the tyrants of their times.

4. Such gathering places as the Husayniyahs should be places for brotherhood, harmony, for remembering Allah Almighty, and honesty in all our dealings with everyone else ranging from friends and brothers, to family members and everyone else; the first and foremost being in our relation with Allah Almighty and the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam.*

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Chapter 5: **Benefiting from Ashura**

According to the Views of Imam Shirazi[45]

by

Karim al-Mahrus[46]

'The month of Muharram is one of the months during which the people of pre-Islamic or pagan times prohibited fighting. Later, in the same sacred month, our blood was spilt and our inviolability was violated and our progeny and women were made captive and our tents were put to the torch and our belongings were plundered and no inviolable thing that the Messenger of Allah had in us remained but it was violated. The Day of Husayn has blooded our eyes and let flow our tears and humiliated our beloved. The land of Karbala[47], the land of tragedy and affliction has made us heirs to tragedy and affliction until the last day. So let the weepers weep over the like of Husayn, for weeping over him is a mitigation for grave sins.'

These are the words of Imam 'Ali ibn Musa al-Ridha *alayhis-salam* in which he depicts for us the extent of the recidivism of the Ummayad regime and the indelible mark that the slaughter of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* left on the people of the Prophet's household or his Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhis-salam*. Such an immense tragedy it was and such a stain on the face of Islam.

However, one of the secrets of the magnitude of the day of Ashura lies in Imam Husayn's *alayhis-salam* knowledge of the fate that awaited him and the pure people, his household. He had certain knowledge that he would be martyred and he had alluded to this on many occasions in his sermons and speeches during his exit from Mecca and Medina, stating clearly that he was reconciling himself to meeting Allah and that he was determined to expend his lifeblood in the way of Allah and in the aid of the truth and in reviving the Islamic religion. Through this knowledge and certainty, we can see the secret of the divine protection and concern afforded to this

[45] This is the translation of an article that appeared in the Arabic Kuwaiti periodical 'al-Minbar', issue 11 (2nd Year), April 2001, p.18. Translated by Ali Adam, London.
[46] A researcher in The Centre for Islamic Education, London.
[47] The name Karbala is a contraction of *karb* and *bala',* an Arabic compound name literally meaning tragedy and affliction.

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uprising and we can see the greatness of this spirit and the correctness of his reading of the state of the Islamic nation and government.

The Imam *alayhis-salam* put his hand on the pulse of both the nation and the government and when he found that the government was deviating from the way of the true religion, he took hold of the nation to straighten this deviation. He *alayhis-salam* said:

'I have not come forth out of pride or arrogance, nor to cause corruption, nor as an oppressor, but I have come forth to seek the reform of the nation of my grandfather Muhammad. I wish to order the good and forbid the evil and follow the way of my grandfather and my father 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.'

He *alayhis-salam* also said:

'Now, I summon you to revive the features of the truth and to slay innovation. If you answer my call then you will be guided to the ways of righteousness.'

He *alayhis-salam* also said:

'And I summon you to the book of Allah and to the way of His prophet. If you hear what I say and follow me I will lead you to the path of righteousness.'

In the thought of the supreme religious authority (*marji'*) Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Husayni al-Shirazi, we can clearly sense today the effects of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and the extent of its influence on the survival of the Islamic religion and in protecting it from the guiles of the enemy, all because of the historical stance that he took and the sacrifice he made on the day of al-Taff.[48] We can also discern with ease from amongst these effects that the power of government, however great and developed that might be, can never compare with the power of the nation. The power of government is partial and is derived from the power of the nation above which there can be no power as long as the nation remains firmly upon the religion and follows it. The Imam *alayhis-salam*, alongside his knowledge by divine will of what would happen to him and to his family on the day of Ashura, also knew of the outcome of events and of the future. His uprising did not only uncover the scandals and crimes of the Umayyad regime but there was a mission behind this uprising; namely to make clear the reality of the Islamic

[48] Al-Taff is another name for Karbala.

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religion and to clarify its features for everyone. The result of the battle of Karbala was the uprooting of the Umayyad government despite its tyranny, influence, power, wealth and military might at a time when the society was not even allowing itself to consider the question of overthrowing the Umayyads because of their might and despotism. The events at Karbala renewed life for Islam and corrected the religious beliefs that had arisen due to the Umayyad's fabrication of prophetic traditions or *hadith* and their adoption of ideas from false philosophies. Ideas such as predeterminism (*jabr)* - the idea that men are compelled by Allah in their actions; delegation (*tafwid)*, and theomorphism (*tajsim*) - the idea that Allah has a bodily form, and others like them, which served to shore up the pillars of their illegal regime. Hence Islam appeared once again, shining in the true form in which Allah had revealed it to His noble messenger *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*, in the form of the madhhab or school of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhis-salam* after being cleansed of the detritus of Umayyad falsehood.

This uprising was and remains a model for all other liberationist uprisings in the world against oppressors. This uprising was the 'big bang', which prepared the way for a succession of revolutions and motivated those involved in the struggle to defend the sacred values of Islam and taught them the art of combating tyranny and to be steadfast in the struggle until they achieved a life of nobility and freedom. The nation then is a great power, and government has no power if the legality of its existence has not acquired the approval of the sacred law (*shari'ah*) and the nation. The nation must grasp however, that for the legal government to be righteous the nation must also be righteous. On this note, the renowned scholar Sheikh al-Baha'i says:

'There is no fault in the religion of Islam itself, rather the fault lies in the Muslims themselves.'

Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, through his uprising, pointed out the way for the future generations and made clear the path to solving the problems of society and attaining the happiness of this life and the nobility of the next. When Islamic society indeed put into practice some of these Islamic teachings it lived a life of prosperity and nobility as history witnessed in the days of Sayyid al-Murtada and Sheikh al-Mufid and Allamah al-Hilli and Sheikh al-Karaki and Sheikh al-Baha'i and Allamah al-Majlisi (May

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Allah venerate their souls)[49]. Then society was living an honourable life without being afflicted by any of the problems that afflict the Muslims today. On the contrary, it was the enemies of Islam who suffered from these crises since they were drowning in the seas of ignorance and backwardness and the like. 'Husayn is the lantern of guidance and the ship of salvation,' as the Messenger of Allah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* said. This *hadith* or prophetic tradition depicts the world in the finest of ways in order to bring us closer to understanding the true nature and reality of this world. It likens this world to the dark depths of the ocean from which there is no salvation except by means of a ship and there is no way to escape from its glooms except by a lantern. This is a splendid simile. Man in this world is in need of a lantern to light for him the way otherwise he will be lost in the darkness of ignorance and poverty and illness and will fall into the abysses and will not be able to perceive and hence avoid the wild animals and beasts which seek to prey on him. He is also in need of a ship, which will preserve him from drowning and perishing in the clashing depths of the seas of the world and will take him to the shores of tranquillity in safety and peace. What is it that functions as the lantern to guide mankind in the world and the ship to rescue him from its depths? It is none other than that which was specified by divine revelation and which was pointed to by the Messenger of Allah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* when he said:

> *'The people of my household are as the stars, which ever one of them you seek guidance from, you will be guided.'*

He *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* also said:

> *'The similitude of the people of my household is as the ship of Noah, whoever boards it will be saved, and whoever tarries behind from it will drown.'*

These two descriptors; the lantern and the ship, apply to all the fourteen impeccable personages namely; The Prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih*, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib *alayhis-salam*, Fatima al-Zahra' *alayhas-salam*, Hasan al-Mujtaba *alayhis-salam*, Husayn al-Shahid *alayhis-salam*, 'Ali al-Sajjad *alayhis-salam*, Muhammad al-Baqir *alayhis-salam*, Ja'far al-Sadiq *alayhis-salam*, Musa al-Kadhim *alayhis-salam*, 'Ali

[49] They are some of the most eminent authorities in Islamic sciences and hadith, who lived over the period ten to fifteenth centuries. Their researches and works in the teachings of Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* still form the basis of many contemporary investigations and works.

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al-Ridha *alayhis-salam*, Muhammad al-Jawad *alayhis-salam*, 'Ali al-Hadi *alayhis-salam*, Hasan al-'Askari *alayhis-salam*, and Muhammad al-Mahdi *alayhis-salam*. The Prophet *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* himself is the greatest lantern and ship. Allah has said: **{O you the Prophet, surely We have sent you as a witness and a bringer of glad tidings and a warner and a summoner to Allah and as an illuminating lantern}**. Humanity, living as it is in the darkness of ignorance and drowning in the depths of chaos, confusion and anxiety, has no cure available to it – if it wants salvation – other than seeking illumination by the light of those pure people and boarding their ship; for they are the complement to the wise book (the Qur'an) as the Messenger of Allah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* has said:

> *'I leave behind me the two weighty things; the book of Allah and my household. As long as you adhere to these two you will never go astray after me ever.'*

This points to the fact that without adherence to the household alongside adherence to the book there will be a resultant straying which, in this world means dishonour and ignominy and in the next world means hell and the inferno.

The month of Muharram is the month of the sorrows of the people of the Prophet's household *alayhum-as-salam*. It is the month when the religion was renewed by the uprising of the 'ship of salvation' and the 'lamp of guidance' (i.e. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*). In this sacred month, a strong Islamic nation should derive great benefit from this uprising. The supreme religious authority Ayatollah Muhammad al-Shirazi believes that the benefit of this month has been confined previously to one aspect only; namely to the reviving of religious practises such as establishing prayer, and paying the statutory *Khums* and *Zakat* along with other acts of worship, ethical practises and etiquettes, and the building of religious centres in the name of Husayn *alayhis-salam* and mosques and developing sites of religious interest as well as feeding the poor and providing water and the like. Two other aspects should be added to this, namely:

1. The implementation of the laws and rulings of Islam generally and fully. At the top of which comes a system of consultative government through the holding of free and fair elections to set up a government which fulfils the conditions stipulated by Islam. Next come the freedoms that Allah has ordered in saying: **{. . . and (for the Prophet) to relieve them from the heavy burdens**

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and the yokes that were upon them}, such as the freedom to form Islamic political parties under the supervision of the Islamic religious authorities (*maraji'*), the freedom to trade, the freedom to manufacture, the freedom to cultivate land, the freedom to build, the freedom to travel and settle in a place, the freedom to print and publish, the freedom of association, the freedom of expression, and all the other freedoms conferred by Islam and mentioned in the Qur'an and the *sunnah* or traditions and deeds of the Prophet. Next comes the abolition of taxes and customs and excise, and of all the laws that have no basis in the Qur'an and the *sunnah* or in the consensus of scholars or reason. Then comes the institution of Islamic unity meaning that no borders will exist between the countries of Islam and no differences small or large will be recognised between nationalities or races. For **{The believers are brothers}** and in the words of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*:

> *'By my life, the Imam is none but one who rules by the book and stands up for justice and equity and follows the religion of Allah and restrains himself for the sake of Allah.'*

Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* explains his eternal uprising saying:

> *'O Allah, you know that what we did was not out of competition for worldly power, nor were we seeking the vanities of this world, but we desired to see the features of your religion and reform in your land and so that the oppressed of your servants might find respite and so that your commands and laws might be carried out.'*

2. The propagation of the message of Allah – Islam - to the people of the world as a whole and instilling Islamic values and ideals. The month of Muharram can become an appropriate starting point for propagating this message and these values and ideals, which were embodied in the goals of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, to a thirsty humanity. This mission can be funded through collections at gatherings and Husayniyas, and forming bodies, which will send missionaries to every part of the world. Benefit may be derived from the gatherings held in remembrance of Husayn in that they stir up deep emotions in the self and the occasion they provide for intellectual direction, which has an effect in changing human behaviour. Speakers should concern

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themselves in their sermons with showing the way to social responsibility and institutions should be established in every mosque and Islamic centre for the task of fulfilling the material needs of the people according to priorities. These may be funded by donations from charitable people and businessmen and the wealthy. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* said in encouraging donations and expending in the way of Allah:

> *'Your wealth does not belong to you unless you spend it in the way of Allah. Therefore do not leave it as a store for those who come after you, when you yourself will be held responsible for it. Know that you will not survive to make use of it and it will not remain for you, so consume it before it consumes you.'*

Attention and concern must be paid to Islamic institutions for they continue to experience two crises; quantitative and qualitative. There is a noticeable lack in the number of Islamic cultural and social institutions and places of worship for Muslims in the Islamic world and for the Islamic communities in other countries. This quantitative lack may be filled by exploiting the occasion of Ashura so that preachers and hosts of gatherings concern themselves with setting up such institutions by encouraging and persuading the people to participate in providing the means and laying the ground work. In this way and through these gatherings, which are spread throughout the world, we will be able, each year, to establish one hundred thousand institutions of differing types such as schools, mosques, Husayniyahs, libraries, clinics and hospitals, orphanages, radio and television stations, research institutes and newspapers and the like. After fifteen years this would probably equal the number of institutions the Christians have provided in Africa alone where they have founded hundreds of thousands of institutions.

As for the qualitative side, we must attain the necessary administrative and other skills to run these institutions in an organised and lasting manner so that the cultural institutions such as the Husayniyahs and mosques can be a source of thought and awareness including the scientific analysis of the events of Karbala and elsewhere, and linking the past to the present and the future. Without this, society will not be able to combat the dangers that surround it. The intellectual level of the pulpit must be deep so that the youth in particular can be protected from deviancy when it raises its ugly head. Often, it is a low intellectual level that is the cause of the deviancy of the youth and takes them to prisons and detention centres, and to the grave or exile. Hence, those who host gatherings and administrators must

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exhort the preachers to deliver the best possible psychological, social, historical, doctrinal, and other analyses. The speakers best equipped to carry out this task must be invited and their lectures must be recorded and published and distributed amongst the people to stir their emotions and direct them towards the good and the right and towards reform so that a wealth of information is available in all fields and aspects.

Islam is a world religion for the rescue of all people from darkness. It is not the religion of one thousand million Muslims only. However, this calls for great a deal of support. Is it not a source of regret that there are no more than few hundred Muslim missionaries working outside Islamic countries, whereas statistics show that the number of Christian missionaries in Africa is more than ten thousand and in Asia ninety thousand all equipped with all the aids and technology they need and whose task is to convert the Asians and Africans to Christianity? They have succeeded in converting tens of millions in these two continents.

If we, then, were to take the month of Muharram as a starting point for these three tasks, we will have fulfilled what is incumbent upon us as far as possible, as well as bringing Muslims from slavery to mastery and many non-Muslims from the darkness to the light. This is in reality a world Islamic movement not merely a local or territorial one, which has begun to adopt these three tasks. Our condition today is as that of the person yawning as he is newly awakened from a long sleep. However, this is a sign of the beginning of an awakening rather than a preparation for sleep. The Muslims have slept long enough so that their lands have been divided up, their wealth plundered, their honour torn, and their blood spilt. Illegal laws have been placed over them and chaos, ignorance, illness, poverty, enmity and sectarianism reign. Now, thanks be to Allah, they have begun to rise and they are able to make a programme for this rising out of these three aforementioned tasks and starting from this sacred month of Muharram so they might reach their lofty goal if Allah wills. Among that which Imam Shirazi strongly recommends as part of this programme is:

1. The establishment of an organisation and expanding it to encompass all the lands of Islam so that communication may take place amongst the various wings, on the condition that this organisation includes free and fair elections held for example every two years.

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2. The founding of a supreme council for all Islamic organisations to discuss affairs and confirm activities by majority opinion. For Allah has said: **{And your affairs are settled by mutual consultation}** and Amir-ul-Mu'minin 'Ali ibn Abi Talib *alayhum-as-salam* has said:

   'I adjure you by Allah to organise your affairs'.

3. Creating complete awareness by alerting the nation to its points of weakness and strength so that the former may be eliminated and the latter may be benefited from. This calls for millions of books. The Imam *alayhis-salam* said:

   'He who has knowledge of his times cannot be taken unawares'

4. The adoption of fine morals as in Allah's words: **{You were the best nation brought out for the people, enjoining the good}** like adopting reason and critical examination, flexibility, and affability, co-operation, sincerity, consultation, and mutual respect and the like, and **{and forbidding the evil}** like weakness, cruelty, despotism, sectarianism, hatred and feuding.

5. The organisation should maintain links with the populace and not become isolated from it as can be seen today in some Islamic organisations where pride, conceit and snobbery are present as well as the adoption of innovations and other things that will distance them from the public and will prevent them from being able to attract the people and will lead in the end to their failure. Imam 'Ali *alayhis-salam* said: 'He who acts despotically on his own opinion will perish.' Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* said: 'You should know that the needs that the people have of you are among the blessings of Allah upon you.'

6. The following of jurists (fuquha) and authorities (maraji'). Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* said:

   'The running of affairs and rulings are in the hands of the scholars of Allah who are certain of that which Allah has made lawful or unlawful.'

   If the organisation distances itself from the religious authorities, which have been chosen by the nation, it will fail even if the organisation creates an authority for itself upon whatever pretext

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or excuse. The nation should follow the true authorities and should not be fooled by falsities.

7. The recruiting of Islamic talent such as scholars, preachers and thinkers, teachers, and staff as well as infrastructure such as publishing houses, libraries, printing presses and schools. All these talents are important in ensuring the arrival at the desired goal, for the seas are made of raindrops and the deserts from grains of sand!

If we make the gatherings in remembrance of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* a starting point for building an authentic and true Islamic nation, distinguished by the consultation of the religious scholars and the following of their rulings, and party pluralism, and the just rule of Islamic laws, then we will have conveyed a great deal to Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* who sacrificed himself, his family and his companions for nothing less than implementing Islam and rescuing the people. In the ziyarat of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* are the words of the Imam *alayhis-salam* addressing Allah: ‘ . . . to rescue Your servants from ignorance and the confusion of losing the way.’

Then the despotic organisations in all their forms will vanish, and power will be distributed amongst all the classes and groups whether that be power of governing or arms or knowledge or wealth. Capabilities will appear and bear fruit and the realities of knowledge in the fields of agriculture, manufacture, trade, education, and in the military will be become manifest. The lands snatched from Islam will be returned and their people will be rescued from the claws of colonisers. All this however requires an increase in sincerity of purpose combined with piety in the issues of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. For Allah accepts the works of the pious as he has said: **{Indeed Allah accepts from the pious}.** If we do all this, we will have participated in explaining the goal of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and in continuing on the path he took.

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Chapter 6: **Fatawa on Ashura Ceremonies**

Introduction

Every year, the holy month of Muharram acts as a reminder to the Muslims of the sombre memory of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam,* the grandson of the final Messenger of Allah, the holy Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him and his progeny. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* along with his brothers and nephews and some seventy of his loyal companions, were killed by the army of the brutal tyrant Yazid on the tenth day of Muharram – Ashura – in the field of the land of Karbala by the River Euphrates, while overwhelmed by severe thirst. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* stood up to defend the noble teachings of Islam, which his grandfather had brought, against the relentless efforts of the Umayyad dynasty to uproot those teachings and replace them with every evil and decadence they could master. Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* rose to revive Islam anew, for if it was not for the effort and monumental sacrifice that he and his followers and family members offered, there would most probably be no sign of Islam as we know it today. For such reasons, the holy month of Muharram, and the following month of Safar – both of which are known as the months of sorrows – are the time to mourn the tragic loss of such an impeccable personality, as well as the time to reflect on the teachings and movement of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam,* who became known as *Sayyid-ul-Shuhada'* meaning "Master of the Martyrs", and *Abul-Ahrar* meaning "Father of the Free".

Every year, during the first ten days of the month of Muharram, special programs are held to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. These Imam Husayn-special commemoration programs – or *Husayni Sha'a'er* in the Islamic literature – serve as a school of learning for everyone, and at all levels. The Husayni Sha'a'er mainly consist of a series of lectures and speeches exploring the personality of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, and those of his devout companions, covering the bravery, mission, and achievements of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. These programs revive the fervour of the battlefield of Karbala and the sacrifice offered by Imam Husayn – the beloved grandson of Prophet Muhammad – the final Messenger of the Creator to humanity – and the son of Imam Ali and Lady Fatima al-Zahra', daughter of the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon them.

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The lectures also cover the movement of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam,* the values he stood for, and the aim for which he paid everything he had – his own life as well as those of his sons, brothers, nephews, and companions. Various aspects of the teachings of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* are normally addressed in these public lectures and speeches.

As part of the Husayni Sha'a'er, there are also programs of public show of grief, known as *Ma'tam* or *Ta'ziah* in Arabic, *Azadari* in Farsi. The programs of *Ta'ziah* take various forms such as: reciting lamentation poetry and chest beating. However, on the tenth day of Muharram, Ashura – the day of the killing of Imam Husayn, in their grief and sorrow, and in their wish to have been able to join Imam Husayn in his battle with falsehood, devotees of Imam Husayn take part in public processions of self-flagellation (*Zanjir*) and/or hitting themselves on the top of their head with a sword or any other sharp blade to allow blood to flow – known as *Tatbir* in Arabic or *Qama-Zani* in Farsi, - in sympathy with Imam Husayn, and his companions. To create the atmosphere of the battlefield of Karbala, drums, horns, and cymbals are also used during the ceremony of *Tatbir* program. Needless to say that the ceremonies of *Tatbir* have been conducted for many generations, stretching over many centuries, and starting with the era of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam*. Over the many centuries the *Tatbir* program has proven to be very safe and is performed by experienced individuals.

Tatbir is performed by the devotees throughout the world; from India, Pakistan, and the Middle East, to Europe, America and Australia. This is perhaps one of the manifestations of the famous saying; *"Every day is Ashura, and every land is Karbala."*

There are also programs of enactments – known as *Shabeeh* – depicting the scenes of the battlefield of Karbala and its aftermath, showing the severed heads, and the decapitated bodies, the marching of troops of Yazid taking the women and children captive, etc.

After the killing of the Imam and his companions, the victorious army of Yazid torched their tents, and the fearful women and children, being chased from one place to another, ran over the ashes of the blazing tents that had been set alight by the triumphant troops.

Today, the torching of the tents are also enacted on the day of Ashura, by setting alight many tents that had been set up for this purpose. In sympathy with the sufferings of the women and children, many Muslims on the day of Ashura, also walk barefoot on red-hot charcoal.

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Although practices of *Tatbir* and fire walking on the day of Ashura are common amongst the Muslims, however, they are not the only people who engage in such practices. *Tatbir* for example is not limited to Muslims alone, but also followers of other religions such as Christianity perform such acts in certain parts of the world, as a sign of their devotion to Jesus Christ peace be upon him. Every year on the occasion of Easter, Christians in the Far East for example perform public acts of flagellation out of devotion to the prophet Jesus son of Mary peace be upon them. This issue is one of the topics of an interview conducted with a Christian scholar that appears at the end of this book.

Furthermore, the practice of walking on fire that devotees of Imam Husayn do in remembrance and sympathy with the women and children that were taken prisoners after the killing of Imam Husayn and his companions, is not limited to Muslims only. Even secular and non-religious people practice and promote fire walking as part of their endeavour to enhance their physical, mental and spiritual stamina.

However, due to the widespread Islamophobia, and despite the non-uniqueness of these programs as referred to above, some Muslims go as far as calling for such programs to be stopped as, in their opinions, these programs "give bad image of Islam and Muslims".

However, just as for any other aspect of life – private or public – that the Muslims seek clarification on the legality of a particular act from the Islamic legalistic viewpoint, the Muslim people at various stages and at various times have sought the opinion of the *Maraje'* of time – the Authorities on Islamic law – for such programs as the Tatbir and fire walking. In the following pages the Fatawa (decrees) of the Muslim world's leading and most eminent *Maraje'* of recent time are presented, along with questions and answers on the issues concerned from the legalistic and historic point of view.

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Decrees of 22 of the most Eminent *Maraje'* of the Shi'a world regarding Ta'ziah or 'Azadari for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*

[The list below is not exhaustive, but it only enlists some of the eminent *Maraje'*.]

Fatwa of al-Imam al-Sheikh Abdul-Kareem al-Ha'ery

Founder of the current Hawzah[50] in the holy city of Qum

"The hitting of swords on the heads (causing bleeding) is alright (allowed) provided there is no harm to the person doing this. Furthermore no one has the right to prohibit this (hitting the head with sword). In fact all kinds of TA'ZIAH – mourning – for SAYYID AL-SHUHADA' – Imam Husayn – may our souls be sacrificed for him, are MUSTAHAB – desirable deeds."

The above Fatwa by Sheikh Abdul Kareem al-Ha'ery was endorsed and signed by the following eminent Maraje':

1. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sheikh Muhammad al-Araki,
2. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Muhammad Ridha al-Gulpaygani,
3. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Shahab-el-Deen al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi,
4. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Hasan al-Tabataba'e al-Qummi,
5. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Waheedi,
6. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Mirza Jawaad al-Tabrizi,
7. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Muhammad Saadiq al-Rouhani,
8. Ayatollah al-Udhma Muhammad Mahdi al-Lankaroudi,

And many other Maraje' and eminent scholars . . .

[50] University for Islamic sciences.

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Fatwa of al-Imam al-Sheikh Muhammad Husayn al-Naa'ini

{*'Ustadhul-'Ulema*} or {Teacher of the *Maraje'*} of the holy city of Najaf.

"There is no doubt as to the permissibility of the beating of the chest and the face with the hands to the point of redness or blackness (of the chest or the face). This is also extended to the lashing of the shoulders and the back with chains to the extent mentioned (above), and even if this led to bleeding. As for causing the bleeding of the head by sword beating, this is also allowed provided it does not lead to endangering harm, such as unstoppable bleeding or harm to the scull, etc. as it is known amongst the experts in doing this (hitting on the head)."

The above Fatwa by Sheikh Muhammad Husayn al-Naa'ini was endorsed and signed by the following eminent Maraje':

1. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Mohsen al-Hakim,
2. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Muhammad Kaadhem al-Shari'at-Madari,
3. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Abd-el-A'la al-Sabzewary,
4. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Abul-Qassim al-Kho'i,
5. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Muhammad Ridha al-Gulpaygani,
6. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al-Seestani,
7. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid Muhammad Saadiq al-Rouhani,
8. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Mirza Jawaad al-Tabrizi,
9. Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sheikh Husayn al-Waheed al-Khurasani,

And many other Maraje' and eminent scholars . . .

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Fatwa of Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid al-Kho'i

The former leader of the Hawzah of the holy city of Najaf

Question:
Is there any problem with causing the bleeding of the head – TATBIR – as it is practiced, to express one's grief about the martyrdom of our Imam Husayn peace be upon him, assuming there is going to be no permanent harm?

Answer:
There is no problem with that, given the assumption made in the question, and Allah knows best.

Question:
You stated that there is no problem in causing the bleeding of the head – known as Tatbir – if it does not lead to harm. It is said that it is not more than a permissible act, then can Tatbir be *Mustahab* – desirable – if the intention was the upholding and honouring the *Sha'a'er* – signs of Allah – and sympathy with the *Ahl-ul-Bayt, alayhum-as-salam*?

Answer:
Most probably Allah Almighty would give *thawab* – reward (the individual) – for sympathising with the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* if the intention is sincere.

Presented by www.ziaraat.com

Fatwa of Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Sayyid al-Seestani

Current leader of the Hawzah of the holy city of Najaf

Question:
What is the ruling regarding the lashing with chains, chest beating, and walking on fire on the occasion of mourning the martyrdom of Imam Husayn peace be upon him?

Answer:
If (these are) not associated with extreme harm or loss of limb, there is no objection.

Question:
What is the ruling regarding wearing black, and chest beating when commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn peace be upon him, as well as other infallible Imams peace be upon them?

Answer:
This is permissible, and in fact this is regarded as one of the best means of seeking nearness to Allah, since it is upholding and honouring the *Sha'a'er* of Allah Almighty[51].

[51] This is a reference to the Qur'anic verse 22:32. – translator.

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Fatwa of Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Imam al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Shirazi

"It is desirable to observe and establish all kinds of mourning programs for Imam Husayn alayhis-salam, such as weeping, chest beating, Tatbir or Qama-Zani, Husayni Majlis, etc. There is no objection to organise such programs in public and to march through the streets in full view of men and women. Also there is no objection to carry flags, standards, banners, and such like in front of the mourning processions, however, instruments of music may not be used."

Question:
What is your opinion regarding hitting the head with sword – Tatbir – on the day of Ashura whether or not it harms the individual?

Answer:
The most common and widely known opinion of the *Fuqaha*[52] is that the desirability (of Tatbir) is (recognised) if it is not (considered) extremely harmful.

Question:
If one engages in the *Ta'ziah* (mourning) program of for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, and goes on to serve the program, but does not do Tatbir, is he regarded as a sinner, who deserves to be humiliated?

Answer:
Tatbir is a desirable act, and a *mukallaf* – i.e. one who has reached the adolescence age and is duty bound – may forsake a desirable act. However, it is not allowed to humiliate a *Mu'min*[53], and also one who does not do Tatbir may not humiliate or insult others, or accuse them (of false things).

[52] scholars of Islamic law.
[53] A faithful

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More Fatawa from Imam Muhammad Shirazi

Husayni Ceremonies

Question:
If religious Sha'a'er (ceremonies) in general, and the Husayni ones in particular were to be ridiculed by others, should one stop practicing those Sha'a'er?

Answer:
The Holy Qur'an states, **{alas for the servants! there comes not a messenger to them but they mock him!}**[54] It is imperative to educate those who are ignorant of the reason and background of these ceremonies and remind those who are familiar (with them of the significance of these Sha'a'er).

Question:
If failure and neglecting to attend in the Husayni Majalis (programs) would lead to weakening the Islamic spirit for the individual, and his family, would this be considered as a sin?

Answer:
Yes.

Question:
Is it obligatory to ensure that Ashura is commemorated?

Answer:
Yes, and it (Ashura) is one of the most important of religious Sha'a'er.

Question:
They say we are the nation of weeping . . . the nation of political weeping . . . we are a nation that with its tears floods and destroys the obstacles that confront Islam. What is your opinion?

Answer:
Weeping is a powerful weapon for expressing oppression, and this weapon has been used by many of the prophets and saints, and there is no doubt that the case of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* has attracted many to Islam.

[54] The Holy Qur'an, [36:30]

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Imam Husayn and Events of Ashura

Question:
I have heard a hadith that Imam Baqir *alayhis-salam* has said, "All Imams are ships of salvation, but Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is the largest (Ship). Is this hadith true, and where can I find it?

Answer:
It is reported that the Imams (of Ahl-ul-Bayt) *alayhum-as-salam* are the ships of salvation, and the ship of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is bigger, and in the deep seas (it is) faster . . . . You may refer to "*Ikmaal al-Deen wa Itmaam al-Ni'mah*" by sheikh al-Sadouq, *"Ma'ali al-Sebtayn"* by sheikh Muhammad Mahdi al-Mazandarani.

Question:
When Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* headed for Iraq, did he know that he would be killed and his family taken prisoners? And if yes, does this not constitute exposing oneself to a certain death?

Answer:
He knew of his fate, and his action is the manifestation of:

if the religion of Muhammad is not to survive except with my death,
then O Swords! Take me.

Question:
On his way to Iraq, was Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* seeking martyrdom, or was he seeking power, and why?

Answer:
He was seeking martyrdom, for Islam depended on that course of action.

Question:
Is there no contradiction between the peace pact Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam* made with Mo'awiyah, and the uprising of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* against Yazid?

Answer:
There is no contradiction between the two stances, since each has his own duties and responsibilities according to the circumstances of the day. The circumstances of uprising that Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* faced did not arise at the time of Imam Hasan *alayhis-salam*, nor did they arise during the first ten years of his (Imam Husayn's) *imamah* (leadership). More details about the lives and the circumstances are given in details in reference books, which address the lives of the two Imams *alayhum-as-*

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salam. For us it is sufficient the saying of the Prophet Muhammad *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* when he said,

"Al-Hasan and al-Husayn are two Imams whether they rise up or not".

Question:
What would you put Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah[55] not joining Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* down to?

Answer:
He was sick and unable to go.

Chest beating

Question:

What is your opinion with regards to chest beating ceremonies for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, and was it practiced at the time of the Ma'soom Imams *alayhum-as-salam?*

Answer:

(Performing) chest beating ceremonies for the Ma'soomeen *alayhum-as-salam* is permissible, and in fact Mustahab (desirable), and the ladies descendent from Fatima al-Zahra' established chest beating in the presence of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin *alayhis-salam*.

Tatbir

Question:
Some individuals say that I do not see shedding my tears as enough to express my grief for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, his household and his companions on the day of Ashura. So is hitting myself with sword and injuring myself is allowed?

Answer:
The Husayni Sha'a'er, including Tatbir, are some of the *raajih*[56] issues. Tatbir is a Mustahab or desirable deed, unless it leads to death, loss of limb, or loss of faculties.

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[55] Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah is Imam Husayn's half brother, whose mother was called al-Hanafiyyah.
[56] *raajih* means acts that are permissible, but could be classified as desirable, or even obligatory depending on the circumstances of the time. The determination of those circumstances that render this are made by the Marje'. – translator

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Question:
Imam Mahdi, *alayhis-salam* and *may Allah hasten his reappearance*, addresses his great grandfather, Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* (in Zeyarah-al-Nahiyah): ". . . I shall mourn you every morning and every evening, and **I shall weep blood for you instead of tears . . ."** Can we deduce from this statement that Tatbir (hitting the head with swords to make blood flow) is an emphatically desirable act?

Answer:
Yes.

Question:
Did the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* used to hurt themselves for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, in commemorating and glorifying the Husayni Sha'a'er, such that we should follow suite?

Answer:
Yes, as can be found in various reports and narrations. Some of these would be discussed in more detail later on in this book.

Question:
What is your opinion regarding the reports that Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam,* when she saw the head of her brother Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam,* being paraded in public, hit her forehead on the bar of the carriage she was travelling in, causing bleeding to flow from beneath her veil, which was visible to those onlookers who witnessed the event?

Answer:
Yes that is proven.[57]

Question:
Some would raise questions that, "why do we not give blood on the day of Ashura instead of performing Tatbir, since that would be more civilized than Tatbir, which may pollute the environment, and other sects may ridicule us." What is your opinion in this respect?

Answer:

[57] {Some of the famous references, which confirm the above report, are as follows:
Bihaar al-Anwaar; v. 45, p. 114, *Jalaa' al-'Oyun;* v. 2, p. 238, *Zaynab al-Kubra;* p. 112, *Asraar al-Shahadah;* p. 474, *Al-Muntakhab;* v. 2, p. 478, *Nusrat-ul-Madhlum;* p. 18.
Needless to say that 'Allamah Majlisi – compiler of Bihaar al-Anwaar – and Sheikh al-Shari'ah al-Isfahani have confirmed the authenticity of the report.}

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Giving blood in its own right is good, but this does not conflict with performing the Husayni Sha'a'er. Furthermore, drawing blood from the head accompanies many health benefits, and it is a Sunnah of Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih,* and Rasulollah used to call it *al-Mughithah* and *al-Munqithah* (literally meaning "the saviour") and both the Shi'a and the non-Shi'a agree on its authenticity, and Bukhari and many others have reported many narrations in this respect. It is reported from Imam Sadiq *alayhis-salam* that, "It is cure from insanity, leprosy and other skin diseases, diseases that lead to blindness, and toothache". The Mu'minin may give blood on another day, such as 3rd of Sha'baan, which is the birthday of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*.

Question:
If something such as Tatbir would result in distorting the image of the true religion, which in turn would weaken other Husayni Sha'a'er in the heart of the Mu'minin[58], what is the ruling then?

Answer:
Tatbir is generally a desirable act, and it is actually not proven that it causes distortion and the like. In fact many media experts would consider it as one of the most important means of education, giving vitality to the (Shi'a) school of thought[59]. Furthermore, merely on grounds that an act would bring about distortion or ridicule, does not mean that one may abandon a ruling or a practice, otherwise we would have to abandon many of rulings of Allah Almighty, such as hijab, hajj, the daily prayers, fasting, etc. Allah Almighty says in the Qur'an: **{alas for the servants! there comes not a messenger to them but they mock him!}**[60]. Does the mock and ridicule of the prophets means that they should withdraw from their mission?

Question:
Is the harm attained as a result of Tatbir regarded as permissible or desirable, for which one would be rewarded? Did the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* encourage this?

Answer:
Tatbir is permissible if it does not result in death, loss of a limb, or loss of use of a limb – such as blindness of an eye. If Tatbir was performed with

[58] The faithful

[59] See for example the interview with a Christian scholar towards the end of this book.

[60] The Holy Qur'an, [*36:* 30]

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intention of sympathy with Sayyid-al-Shuhada[61] *alayhis-salam*, and to express one's devotion to him and to defend the Truth, to train for and attain faithful spirituality, sacrifice, and steadfastness, then it would be amongst the definite desirable acts, and in this respect scholars in the old and modern times have issued endorsing *Fatawa* (rulings). Many reports have been narrated about the biographies of the Ma'soomeen *alayhum-as-salam* that indicate that the bearing of hardship and losses in the way of Allah, and training and disciplining the self on *Taqwa* (piety) are considered desirable. For example our lady Fatima al-Zahra *alayhas-salam* used to stand up in worship for prolonged periods such that her feet would swell. Another example is that Imams Hasan and Husayn *alayhum-as-salam* used to go to the Hajj pilgrimage in Makkah on foot while their camels walked behind them.

More discussion on this topic can be found in the section on the website Q&A, which follows this section.

Play Acting

Question:
Every year we organise enactment of the scenes of Karbala, focusing on the important personalities such that of the Ma'soom, or al-Abbas, and other members of Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam*. The actors concerned may not fit the reported physical characteristics of the individuals concerned. Is this permissible.

Answer:
It is of the best means to seek closeness to the Almighty to use various permissible means to disseminate the teaching and heritage of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam,* and those of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam.* This must be done with utmost care, paying meticulous attention to details and accuracy, so that the presentation is fitting to the occasion and commendable from every aspect.

Working on Ashura

Question:
Is it permissible to go for work on the day of Ashura?

Answer:
It is Makruh or undesirable, and the work shall not be blessed on that day.

[61] meaning "Master of the Martyrs". This is title of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*.

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Husayni Shrine

Question:
Were the severed heads of the martyrs returned with the captives of Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* and buried with the bodies? Or were the heads buried in another location?

Answer:
The overwhelming evidence is that they were returned back and buried with the sacred bodies.

Question:
We have a mosque in Cairo, where it is believed that the sacred head of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is buried. However, I have also seen in Bihar al-Anwar that the head was buried in the holy city of Najaf. What is your opinion about this issue, and where do you think the head is buried?

Answer:
Based on reliable and authentic sources, the head of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was returned to the holy Karbala and Imam Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* buried the head with the sacred body. There are other claims, but that we mentioned above is the correct one.

Zeyarah

Question:
In some books it is stated that if we wanted to read the Zeyarah (salutation) of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* from a distant location – not actually being in Karbala – we should go to the roof of a building and face the direction of Karbala, and read the Zeyarah. Does this mean that reading the Zeyarah from a room is not acceptable? Is the Zeyarah without reading the associated prayer acceptable?

Answer:
The Zeyarah is acceptable. Going to the roof, and performing the associated prayers increases in the reward.

Question:
Are the Zeyarah of Ashura, and Zeyarah of Nahiyah reliable and authentic? What about Du'a Nudbah?

Answer:

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All are correct, reliable, and authentic.

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Query on Ashura

A group of the faithful presented a question on the validity of Tatbir to the leading Maraje‘ of the Shi‘a world in Muharram 1423 Hijri, March 2002. The question and the respective Maeaje‘ fatawa are given below:

Their Excellencies the Grand Maraje', may Allah protect them.

Salaam Alaykum,

We would be grateful if you express your opinion about *Qama-Zani.* Please state the ruling if it were to be conducted in private and/or in public.

With thanks

The Lovers and Devotees of Abi-Abdillah al-Husayn *alayhis-salam.*

Fatawa

Decrees of the leading Shi‘a Maraje‘ in the holy city of Qum in response to the above query:

Fatwa of Ayatollah al-Udhma Behjat

In the case of it (Qama-Zani) not being harmful, there is no problem with it.

Stamp of the office of Ayatollah al-Udhma Behjat

Fatwa of Ayatollah al-Udhma Abtahi

If it does not cause death, or unbearable harm, it should not be prohibited.

For Allah is the Knower and Helper to the good.

Seal of Ayatollah al-Udhma Abtahi

Fatwa of Ayatollah al-Udhma Mirza Jawad Tabrizi

There is no objection to *Qama-Zani* in its own right.

Seal of Ayatollah al-Udhma Mirza Jawad Tabrizi

Fatwa of Ayatollah al-Udhma Muhammad Sadiq Rouhani

To do *Qama-Zani* is a very good act indeed, and to perform *Qama-Zani* in public enhances the excellence of this act, and if

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one is harmed in the process, the reward (*Thawab*) for this act will be increased even further.

One of the things that I regret not doing is that I did not have the honour to perform this great practice, and now that I am old and frail, I am unable to perform it.

In any case, from all the people who have had the honour to perform this religious symbol I wish to ask them to pray for me after performing *Qama-Zani.*

Signature and seal of

Ayatollah al-Udhma Muhammad Sadiq Rouhani

Fatwa of Ayatollah al-Udhma Langaroudi

Salaam upon the Lovers of Imam Husayn

In our opinion since Abi-Abdillah al-Husayn *alayhis-salam* is *Thar-Allah*, the Blood of Allah, then it would be appropriate, but in fact imperative that for the Blood of Allah, the blood of the creatures of Allah is shed. Therefore not only *Qama-Zani* is permissible, but it is also regarded as one of the Sha'a'er and it has great, and extensive *Thawab* (reward).

It is honour and good for the Husayni Lovers who participate in this beautiful and honourable act, since *Qama-Zani* is one of the Sha'a'er.

Needless to say that to practice this Sha'a'er in public is better.

Salaam be upon the Righteous Lovers (of Imam Husayn) and upon all the Righteous servants of Allah.

Signature and seal of

Abd-el-Saheb Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Murtadhawi Langaroudi

Fatwa of Ayatollah al-Udhma Sayyid Sadiq Shirazi

Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim

To perform Qama-Zani, whether in private or in public, and other kinds of Azadari for Sayyid al-Shuhada Abi-Abdillah al-Husayn - may my soul be his sacrifice and peace and blessings of Allah be upon him - brings about the pleasure of Allah Almighty as well as

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Imam Mahdi - may Allah hasten his reappearance - InSha'Allah. {And he who glorifies the Sha'a'er of Allah, surely it is from the piety of the hearts.} [The Holy Qur'an, 32: 22]

Signature and seal of
Ayatollah al-Udhma Sayyid Sadiq Shirazi

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Q & A via Imam Shirazi's website

Questions & Answers on Ashura and Husayni Sha'a'er
via Imam Shirazi website
www.ImamShirazi.com

Is it true that . . .

Question:
Is it true that the skies wept blood for Imam Husayn when he was killed?

Answer:
Yes. When he was killed, the sky wept blood for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*.

It is reported that when Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was killed not only the residents of the heavens cried for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, but even the skies cried for him and they wept blood for him. This is reported not only in the Shi'a books but also in the most important Sunny references:

"On the day of the martyrdom of Husayn *alayhis-salam* the sky rained blood . . ."

See
Thakhaa'er al-Uqba pp 144, 145, 150.
Al-Sawaa'eq al-Muhriqah pp 116, 192. . . . . .

"(on the day Husayn was killed) there was not a stone which was not lifted but underneath it was found blood . . ."

See
Al-Sawaa'eq al-Muhriqah pp 116, 192.
Tathkirat-ul-Khawaas p 284,
Tafsir ibn Kathir vol. 9, p 162 . . . . .

There are great many more hadith and great many references in abundance in this respect, but for brevity only a few are cited here. These astonishing events were observed and reported by people in various geographical locations. The chroniclers in the reference such as the above record theses reports from people who were in Medina, Karbala, Kufa, Damascus, Jerusalem, etc. But this does not mean that these events were confined to those areas only. In fact we have solid evidence that the skies everywhere

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wept blood for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. Chroniclers in Britain for example, have recorded that in the year coinciding with the event of Ashura, the skies in Britain rained blood, and milk and butter turned into blood! The exact quote is as follows:

"685. In this year in Britain it rained blood, and milk and butter were turned into blood."

The above is recorded in:

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,
Translated, edited by G. N. Garmonsway,
Professor of English,
King's College, London
ISBN 0-460-87038-6

Question:
Is it true that Imam Mahdi *alayhis-salam* weeps blood for Imam Husayn?

Answer:
Yes it is true. Imam Mahdi, *may Allah hasten his reappearance*, mourns for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* every day - night and day - and he weeps blood for his great grandfather, as seen from his declaration he makes in his Zeyarah, known as Zeyarah of Nahiyah:

". . . now that I could not be with you on the day of Ashura to defend you and fight your enemies, I shall mourn you every morning and every evening, and **I shall weep blood for you instead of tears . . .** "

Question:
Is it true that the head of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* spoke, and recited the Qur'an, while being carried from Karbala to Shaam and back?

Answer:
Yes this is true, and the report of this phenomenon is reported by numerous chroniclers and recorded in many references. This topic is referred to in more details in chapter three of this book.

Question:
Is it true that Imam Zayn al-'Abidin *alayhis-salam* mourned and wept for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* for more than twenty years?

Answer:
This issue is widely reported in and recorded in history books. More details are presented in chapter three of this work.

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Who was the first to . . .

Question:
Who was the first individual who founded the Husayni Sha'a'er or the mourning ceremony for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*? was she Zaynab *alayhas-salam*, the loyal sister of Imam Husayn? or was he one of the imams?

Answer:
The first one who founded the Husayni Sha'a'er is Allah the Almighty. This was in the form of the composition of Zeyarah of Ashura. According to authenticate hadith, it (Zeyarah of Ashura) was composed by the Almighty.

[The hadith of Zeyarah of Ashura being the composition of Allah Almighty is reported in Bihar al-Anwar, volume 98, page 300, second edition, 1983/1403, al-Wafa publishers, Beirut.]

After narrating Zeyarah of Ashura and the Du'a that comes after the Zeyarah, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq states,

"I have received this Zeyarah from my father, who received it in this form from Ali ibn al-Husayn, who received it in this form from al-Husayn, who received it from his brother al-Hasan, who received it from Amir-ul-Mu'minin Ali ibn Abi Talib *alayhum-as-salam*, who received it in this form from Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih,* who received it from Jibra'il *alayhis-salam*, who received it from Allah Almighty."

This report also appears in *misbaah al-motahajjid*, pp 542-546, by Sheikh al-Tousi.]

Needless to say, the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* continued with the Husayni Sha'a'er, starting from Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam*, and Imam Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhis-salam*, and the rest of the Ma'soom Imams *alayhum-as-salam*.

Question:
Who was the first person that wept for Imam Husayn for the momentous tragedy of Ashura? is it true that when Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was born, archangel Jibra'il descended upon Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* to tell him of the events of Karbala?

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Answer:
Yes this is true. On a number of occasions, Rasulollah wept for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* while the latter was a baby, and quoted Jibra'il *alayhis-salam* of the events of Ashura in a land called Karbala. However the first person who wept for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was the father of mankind Adam *alayhis-salam*. Adam *alayhis-salam* is reported as saying to archangel Jibra'il when he descended upon him on one occasion, "Why is it that every time I pass through this particular area I feel extremely sad and depressed and weep?" Jibra'il *alayhis-salam* said to Adam, "The name of this particular area is Karbala", and he went on to narrate to him the events of Ashura in detail.

Question:
Who was the first individual who founded the practice of walking on fire?

Answer:
Lady Zaynab and Imam Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhum-as-salam* are the founders of walking on fire in the Husayni Sha'a'er.

When the army of Yazid slaughtered every companion and then Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, they attacked the living quarters of the Imam and his companions. The victorious army of Yazid torched the tents and the women and children fled the blazing tents. Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* was asked why she did not escape, as they were about to torch her tent, she replied "how can I when I have a patient inside the tent". When her tent was eventually set on fire, Lady Zaynab dragged her nephew, Imam Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhum-as-salam,* walking on the fire of the burning tents as they crossed them to a less dangerous area.

Question:
Who was the first Ma'soom Imam from the Ahl-ul-Bayt to hold a mourning and lamentation program, like the traditional Majlis Husayni that are held annually in Muharram today? Or is it that the Majlis Aza that we have today is the invention of the Shi'a over the last few centuries?

Answer:
Imam Zayn al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* was the first member of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* to publicly hold a mourning and lamentation program for Imam Husayn - like the Majlis Aza that are held today.

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After they were released from captivity in Shaam, the women and children of Imam Husayn and his followers, lead by Imam Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* headed towards Karbala so that they could revisit the graves of their loved ones and bury the heads of the Martyrs with their bodies. They arrived at the site of the graves and the battle of Karbala on the twentieth of Safar – forty days after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his followers, hence Arba'een occasion which means forty.

After Karbala they headed back to their hometown - Medina. At the outskirts of Medina, Imam Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* ordered the caravan to halt and to set up their tents there. They ended up staying there for three days. The Imam turned to Bishr Ibn Hadhlam asked him if he could compose poetry and lamentation for Imam Husayn saying, "Your father was a very good poet, have you inherited some of that talent" The reply of Bishr was affirmative.

Bishr Ibn Hadhlam entered Medina and went to the tomb of Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* and announced the martyrdom of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, describing, in his lamentation poetry, the savagery and brutality with which Imam Husayn and his sons, brothers, and companions were killed. This touched the heart of the people to the extent that the whole of Medina was lamenting Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, and almost everyone gathered at the tomb of Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih* to mourn his grandson en masse.

Then the people headed to the outside of the city to receive the remainder of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* . . . . . .

Historical background / evidence for Ashura practices

Question:
I was wondering if you could provide some historical background / evidence to the mourning ceremonies that the Shi'a people perform during the ten days of Muharram. Did any of the Imams perform and or condone such practices?

Answer:
Members of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* always encouraged their followers to commemorate the memory and the tragedy of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and they themselves set examples in different ways for us to follow. Commemoration of Ashura is on the same basis as the commemoration of the birthday of Rasulollah *salla-llahu-alayhi-wa-aalih,*

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which are referred to as Sha'a'er or symbols, just as the Hajj is an example of Allah's Sha'a'er:

"Behold! Safa and Marwa are among the Sha'a'er (Symbols) of Allah "[62]

". . . and whoever holds in honour the Sha'a'er of Allah, such (honour) are truly from the piety of heart."[63]

There are also reports that Imam al-Saadiq *alayhis-salam* arranged for *shabeeh* or 'enactment' about Ali al-Asghar (the infant son of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*) to recreate the scene of Karbala for the people, and the Imam *alayhis-salam* does not hold this enactment solely for the Ali al-Asghar but for all the martyrs of Karbala.

On another occasion a poet comes to the Imam *alayhis-salam* and asks permission to recite a poem about Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*. The Imam *alayhis-salam* said to the poet to wait so that he could set up a partition screen so that the women could come to the Majlis and listen to the lamentation. When the screen was set up, the Imam invited the women to come to the Majlis and asked the poet to start reciting, which he did. The Imam *alayhis-salam* stopped him and asked him to recite the lamentation in the dialect that he does it in their hometown (in Iraq for example).

All these indicate that the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* used to teach and proactively encourage their followers to uphold the memory of the torment, and the teachings of Imam Husayn by words, poetry, enactment, and by showing devotion to Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* in Tatbir as shown by Zaynab al-Kubra *alayhas-salam* (as discussed later).

Furthermore, if today some people engage in practices that does not contradict the teachings of Islam and at the same time those practices depict the tragedy of Karbala in different ways then this could be approved by the Maraje'.

On the legality of Tatbir

Question:
Please enlighten me on Imam Shirazi's teachings regarding the practice of drawing blood during mourning ceremonies in Ashura. Is it permissible or Makruh? What category does it fall in?

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[62] The Holy Qur'an, [*2:* 158]
[63] The Holy Qur'an, [*22:* 32]

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Answer:
Any action of a Muslim may fall in one of the following categories:

Haram	Forbidden
Makruh	Detestable/undesirable but not Forbidden
Halal	Permissible
Mustahab	Desirable but not obligatory
Waajib	Obligatory

As with the issue of hitting the head with swords (*Tatbir* in Arabic or *Qamah-Zani* in Farsi) Imam Shirazi is not exceptional in any way to permit, and encourage this action in Ashura. In fact all high-ranking 'Ulema, Ayatollahs, and Maraje' not only have this permissible, and continue to do so, but throughout the entire history of the Shi'a over the past fourteen centuries, they have always encouraged this, declaring *Tatbir* as Mustahab.

And it should be pointed out that if one suffers hardship in the cause of commemorating Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, then so be it! Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is a special case. He went out of his way to save Islam, and offered all he had in this cause, not only worldly possessions, but also his Ahl-ul-Bayt and sons . . . from Ali al-Akbar to his infant sons . . . and not only that but his womenfolk (wives, sisters, daughters, nieces) were left at the mercy of the most ruthless people on earth, to be taken prisoners. All of this is in aid of us receiving the Islam we have today. If it were not for the monumental sacrifices offered by Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, today we would be living in an unimaginably different world, if at all. Whatever we do is nowhere nearly sufficient in appreciating what Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* did.

Question:
As part of Ashura ceremonies, is shedding one's blood permissible these days? Was it ever permissible?

Answer:
The shedding of blood on the day of Ashura (the 10th of Muharram) for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* is not only Mubaah (permissible), but it is also very Mustahab (desirable) indeed, and all prominent scholars and religious authorities – *Maraje'* – always encouraged it throughout the history of Islam. This included *Tatbir* or *Qama-Zani* which is the hitting of

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the head with swords. The *Maraje'* have even decreed that it is acceptable and permissible if one is harmed in this process, provided the injuries sustained do not constitute permanent injuries or endanger the life of the individual.

The people who practice Tatbir take lead, amongst the teachings of other infallibles, from Zaynab al-Kubra, the heroin of Karbala and the loyal sister of Imam Husayn *alayhum-as-salam*. Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* was the first person who hit her forehead to a bar in the carriage she was in, causing considerable bleeding, when the head of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was being paraded in Kufa. This is one evidence that the shedding of blood is permissible.

Last, but not least, our Imam Mahdi *alayhis-salam* – may Allah hasten his reappearance – states in his Zeyarat-al-Nahiyah, addressing Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*: " . . . . now that I could not help you when needed most help . . . I SHALL WEEP BLOOD FOR YOU INSTEAD OF TEARS." And according to the Fatwa of Imam Shirazi, we can deduce from this statement by Imam Mahdi, that Tatbir is an emphatically Mustahab (desirable) act.

Conducts of members of the Ahl-ul-Bayt

The following questions and answers are related to the topic of Tatbir from the point of view of history and Shari'ah.

Question:
Did Zaynab *alayhas-salam* hit her head on the bar by mistake, or did she do it on purpose? What was her Niyya (intention) when she did the act? Is it categorised as an act of Mubaah (permissible) or Mustahab (desirable)?

Answer:
There is no doubt that Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* hit her head to the bar on purpose, and most certainly this was not done by mistake. And her ladyship *alayhas-salam* did that to show her grief and anger for the catastrophe that had been brought about upon the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* and upon Islam, and in particular to Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* – who was the head of the Ahl-ul-Bayt and leader of Islam.

This act was to declare her stance about the awesome events of Karbala. The evidence that would suggest that Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* did what she did with the intention of a Mustahab act is that with her action

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she wanted to defend the reputation of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and to defend the stance he took against the tyrant of the time. She did that to show how oppressed Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was, and to declare and defend his cause, which is the Truth and the Haqq, and she did that to declare the Batil or False nature of the front opposing Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, who are also the enemies of Islam and the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam*.

Her action was very much Mustahab, if not obligatory, given the role she had to play and the responsibility to discharge under those circumstances. It was her duty to defend the stance of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and his cause, which is the Truth, and to expose the opponents of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* who are the Falsehood.

If it were not for the actions of Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* - and every single action of hers for that matter - and those of Imam Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhis-salam*, the message of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and his action and effort would probably have been lost.

Question:
Was our 4th Imam *alayhis-salam* present when it happened (Lady Zaynab hitting her head to the bar), or was he *alayhis-salam* later informed about it and he *alayhis-salam* consented to the action?

Answer:
Most probably Imam Zayn-al-'Abidin *alayhis-salam* was present when Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* hit her head to the bar, since when she did so, the captives were being paraded in one single caravan through the Kufan streets, and she did so at the moment when the army displayed the head of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and those of his followers.

Even if we were to suppose that the Imam *alayhis-salam* was not present in the vicinity of Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* at that moment, history does not record that the Imam Zayn-al-'Abidin *alayhis-salam* protested against that action! Normally the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* used to advice the people in general not to show (too much) grief for their dead! But on the contrary, the history of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* is full of examples of the Imams actually supporting and encouraging grief – Azadari – for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* and the show and enactment of the scenes of Karbala.

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Question:
A few of the brothers here say that what Zaynab did was an understanding but typical female emotional response to the event of Ashura. What is your opinion about this claim?

Answer:
In arguing against the practice of *Tatbir* or *Qama-Zani*, some might argue that Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* was overwhelmed by emotion, and therefore she hit her head to the bar causing substantial bleeding, i.e. it was a natural, spontaneous, and emotional reaction and nothing more than that. The reply to this argument is two fold.

First, the statement of Imam Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* about her - "an untaught scholar" – would counter any such argument.

The infallible Imam Zayn-al-Abidin *alayhis-salam* used to address Lady Zaynab al-Kubra *alayhas-salam* by saying to her

"Anti al-Hamdu-Lillah 'Alimah Ghair Mu'allimah", meaning

"By the Grace of Allah, you are an untaught scholar"

Alimah Ghair Mu'allimah – an untaught scholar – means that Lady Zaynab alayhas-salam did not her knowledge through the time's formal education, but through divine teaching. Scholars see this statement as indicating a degree of infallibility for Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam,* let alone her expertise in Shari'ah laws, and ability in legislation. Therefore Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* is better able to derive the laws of Islam – if she needs to do so – than any of the scholars we follow today!

Today the scholars and the Fuqaha of Islam derive the laws of Islam for the Halal, Haram, Mandoub, and Makruh while there is no specific hadith about the scientific, scholarly status of any particular Faqih. Despite that we follow their Fatwa and their Decisions in the Halal and Haram. Whereas in the case of Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* there is a specific hadith from the infallible Imam *alayhis-salam* about her status.

So shedding blood to show one's grief for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* was carried out by the likes of Lady Zaynab, and condoned by Imam Zayn al-Abidin *alayhis-salam.*

Second, if she were to be overcome by grief and emotion, she would have done so in Karbala, where the carnage and the unbearably horrific scene there on the Day of Ashura were overwhelming to the utmost degree . . .

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but in fact her Ladyship *alayhas-salam* did not do such a thing there . . . let's not forget that at Karbala she sees her loved ones being slaughtered and decapitated one after the other . . . before her own eyes . . . the young and the old . . . and even the infants have their throats slit . . . no one is spared, no matter what their age is . . . and ultimately she sees the then leader of Islam and Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam*, her most beloved one is slaughtered, beheaded and then his body is trampled upon before her eyes . . . given this most horrific scene – the pain of which no pen can put to paper, with the blood of her loved ones flooding the battlefield and mutilated bodies everywhere, Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* could have taken one of the hundreds of swords there and hit her head with it, but Zaynab *alayhas-salam* does not do that. On the contrary she keeps her composure – which is impossible for almost any man and woman to do under those circumstances – and takes care of the petrified orphans and bereaved women who were being chased by the victorious army of Yazid after their tents were burnt and possessions looted.

Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam* does not hit herself in the highly charged atmosphere at the scene of Karbala, but she does so in the relatively calmer environment of Kufa, the first public gathering following the Karbala massacre. Therefore it cannot be said that she was overcome by grief and emotion and she did not know what she was doing, but in fact her actions were calculated . . . she did that in Kufa to make a public statement . . . about the events of Ashura, Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, his cause, and what he stood for.

Question:
Did any of the Shi'a present at that time follow the example of Lady Zaynab *alayhas-salam?*

Answer:
Whether any of the Shi'a followed her example or not, does not change the legality of this act or reduce or diminish from its desirability. Without researching more into this aspect, we cannot tell whether the people followed the practice of Zaynab *alayhas-salam* or not, especially at the times of the Umayyad brutal rulers when people were arrested on mere suspicions, and executed on the basis of an accusation of being followers of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam*.

Question:
Which of our Imams *alayhum-as-salam* use to draw blood during the days of Muharram?

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Answer:
There have been many books written about the biography of the Imams of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* but were brunt or destroyed. So we do not know if any of the Imams *alayhum-as-salam* did draw blood from their heads on the Day of Ashura. However there have been many hadith that show the extent the ma'soom Imams used to go to in order to emphasise the importance of such matters. This can be seen from the following hadith, which is one of many clear instructions from the infallible Imams to the Shi'a, the enormity of the orders given to the Shi'a goes far beyond what the Shi'a do today, and which they would have to do if it comes to that . . .

Imam al-Saadiq *alayhis-salam* used to encourage the Shi'a to go and visit the tomb of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam,* at all costs and under any circumstances, at a time when the ruling authorities used to threaten the visitors of the tomb with the amputation of the limbs. Despite that, the Imam *alayhis-salam* used to urge them to visit the tomb, and used to detail the *thawab* (rewards) for such visits, even if one loses an arm and a leg in the process and even if such a visit led to the killing of the person visiting the tomb of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*.

This is an irrefutable evidence on how far the Imams of the Ahl-ul-Bayt *alayhum-as-salam* used to go to keep the cause of Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam* alive, even to the extent of arms and legs being amputated and lives lost, let alone the shedding of a few drops of blood, which we do these days!

Needless to say that we have mentioned elsewhere in this work reports that the Imams *alayhum-as-salam* used to, and Imam Mahdi *alayhis-salam, and may Allah hasten his reappearance,* goes as far as weeping blood instead of tears for Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam.*

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Chapter 7: **Husayni Ceremonies- Interview with a Christian Scholar**

Interviewer: Jasim Safar

The following is an extract of the interview with Dr Paul al-Hilw which appeared in the Arabic Kuwaiti monthly 'al-Minbar', issue 12 (2nd Year), May 2001, page 12. Translated by Ali Adam, London.

Introduction

There is a point which must be dealt with in reply to the question: is it true that our upholding of the Husayni ceremonies (*al-sha'a'ir al-Husayniyyah*) including *tatbir* or the striking of the head with a sword, causes others to look down upon us?

The answer is more obvious than the question, for it is evident that all Islamic ceremonies are likely to be looked down upon, including the ceremonies of prayer and the hajj pilgrimage and so on, if we do not work to clarify the philosophy of these ceremonies to others. When people look at us, they require an explanation from us of the religious rituals and ceremonies that we practise. This is a natural thing. If we were not to clarify to them this philosophy or explain its aspects and aims, then we open the door to looks of bewilderment, mockery and denigration. If however, we work towards explaining this to the people, and particularly to thinkers, intellectuals and people of understanding, they will comprehend the lofty goals of these civilised ceremonies and will grasp the extent of their importance and this will result in an increased respect for us and our beliefs and our school of thought.

We do not say this out of thin air, for reality proves this since many thinkers and academics; westerners more than Muslims, have testified to the greatness of these ceremonies and have bowed their heads in respect to them. It would suffice for us to peruse books such as 'Testimonies of western scholars about Husayni ceremonies,' or 'Tatbir, a reality not an innovation,' in order to examine these statements and testimonies in abundance[64].

[64] These books are in Arabic.

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The Interview

Here we record the testimony of a Christian academic who specialises in the study of human societies and their traditions and customs, the Lebanese Maronite, Doctor Paul Joseph al-Hilw. He has been a professor and lecturer at several Lebanese universities and is a writer and linguist in many scientific and academic circles. The testimony of Doctor al-Hilw is of increased importance because of the dissertation he prepared in the past for his masters degree which was entitled: '*The Salafi Movement and its Effects on the Islamic World*.' Presently he is preparing an academic study entitled: '*Comparisons Between Christianity and the Imamiyyah . . . An Analytical Study*.' His Doctoral thesis was entitled: '*The Area of Juzein Over 80 Years . . . An Economic, Cultural and Sociological Study*.' This is the thesis which earned him his doctorate in the University of The Holy Spirit in Lebanon.

We took the opportunity of directing some questions to him about this subject as well as other questions about the noble Husayni revolution. The answers given by Dr al-Hilw, which bore the hallmark of the analytical method, were more than beneficial. What follows is an edited version of the conversation that took place.

□al-Minbar: Why has the voice of the Husayni revolution not subsided and what is the secret of its survival and the renewal it experiences every year?

- According to my belief, the Husayni condition is not confined to the Shi'a alone. It is general and all-inclusive. Hence we find that the Husayni revolution's connection with the principle of resisting oppression has made it very relevant to a person whatever his religion or beliefs might be, because as long as there are oppressors and oppressed then there will always be Yazid and Husayn as two fundamental symbols of oppressor and oppressed. This is from a philosophical and spiritual standpoint. From a practical and existential viewpoint, the rituals that are practised by the Shi'a, during the days of the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam

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Husayn, attach an aspect of renewal to this revolution by which it is made to be continuously present in the human mindset.

□al-Minbar: How so?

- The sociological view of these rituals or ceremonies is that they are international or universal ceremonies, which express the idea of resisting oppression and aiding the oppressed. This expression is what gives these ceremonies a universal flavour and which makes them accepted on a societal level in many different environments and cultures. That a revolution should take place in a certain place and time and also remain alive until our time means that this revolution is connected with universal human concepts on the one hand, and also that it relies upon recurring social interactions on the other. These interactions take the form of these rituals or ceremonies, which take place in the days of Muharram and particularly on the tenth day.

□al-Minbar: Then you believe that these rituals are a source for the survival of this revolution . . . correct?

- Naturally, because when we remember a person the way we remember Husayn, it is not enough that we pray for his soul or remember his deeds or virtues, but rather, something palpable and something painful must be brought into the equation.

□al-Minbar: Painful?!

- Yes, painful. For that which does not cause pain to the body does not persist. It is the pain that preserves the issue and the memory and is what allows them to be implemented on an existential level and to have effects on cultural and social movements. The persistence of the memory and its survival in the human mind must be accompanied by tangible physical pain and this is what the Husayni rituals accomplish. When one feels pain in one's body, one will contemplate its source and when this contemplation leads one to the pains that befell Husayn, then one will evoke his revolution and his principles and goals in a spontaneous way.

□al-Minbar: There are those who believe that Husayni rituals are superstitions, which cause a negative view of those who practise them in the eyes of the world. Is this true in your view?

- This is nonsense and is far from scientific realities. As we know, a superstition is something invented by the human mind to explain a certain form or image that he finds difficult to understand. Hence we see that with

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the development of the human mind the superstition does not persist. The principle as regards superstition is that it does not persist and does not remain but ceases to be when its inventor ceases to be. Religious rituals and ceremonies however, are based on doctrine and faith, which know no imperfection or middle ground; hence they have persisted and survived.

There is a difference between belief and mythology. Mythology consists of imaginings invented by man in order to arrive at what is behind natural phenomena and these imaginings are what generally drives man towards superstitions until he comes close to understanding and comprehending these phenomena. Most of these superstitions are now obsolete; for instance, we can see how those who used to worship the sun or the moon are now extinct except for some in isolated places in Africa. This is because their superstition cannot remain in the face of the tremendous progress that has occurred in scientific discoveries.

The Husaynian ceremonies however, because of their intellectual aspects and living values, have persisted throughout all these centuries and this is because they are practises, which have a connection with the psychological mechanism of human belief. For a person who believes in a thing is not like one who invents a superstition and if these ceremonies were superstitions they would not have persisted for the past fourteen hundred years and would not still be perceptibly increasing every year.

□al-Minbar: What then is the cause of this clamour that has been stirred up about the Husayni ceremonies?

- In truth, I have only seen the existence of this clamour amongst you (Muslims)! In any case, any movement whose fate it is to persist and succeed will naturally find many enemies and critics and whenever the enemies and critics are numerous, the movement always becomes stronger on the condition that it is based upon authentic foundations connected with the psychological belief mechanism as I mentioned.

□al-Minbar: And what about the *tatbir* that the Shi'a practice on the day of Ashura out of grief for their Imam Husayn *alayhis-salam*, what is your evaluation of it as a ritual?

- Tatbir is one method of evoking physical pain to attain a state of complete remembrance as I have already explained. Tatbir is, in my view, the ritual which is most effective in stimulating feelings and sentiments.

□al-Minbar: From your academic studies, are there any examples of this ritual in other societies?

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- Yes, you are not alone in this field. Indeed, we Christians practice rituals which are very similar to the Husayni rituals you practice. Some Christian ceremonies go as far as bloodletting as well and this is similar to *tatbir*. Some Christians hit their bodies with whips during what we call the 'Week of Pains' that is the pains of Christ. In some Christian areas of the Far East, nails are hammered into wrists so that the pain of Christ crucified is felt. Wounds to various places of the body to draw blood also happen there and this is none other than *tatbir* itself. So do not assume that you are the only ones who practice *tatbir* over Husayn, for we practice *tatbir* over Christ. I also do not rule out the possibility that some Christians in Lebanon also practice *tatbir* over Husayn particularly as Husayn has a special station amongst Christians generally and Lebanese Christians in particular.

□al-Minbar: What is this station?

He has a prominent position in Christian thought but here is not the place to discuss it. However, you may sense this station by analysing the reasons for the presence of images of Husayn in Christian churches, some of which I have seen myself. I have also seen images of Imam 'Ali and Lady Fatima al-Zahra who has a special place in Portugal named 'Fatima'. The Vatican has acknowledged it as a holy site and it is said that Fatima al-Zahra manifested herself there at one time. Overall, Christian ideology recognises these personalities as holy personalities which have their own stations. And let us not confine the position of Husayn to Christian thought alone, for he has a prominent station in many different religions and philosophical schools of thought. This is because the revolution of Husayn has a humanistic and universal aspect to it, which aims at moulding the concepts of mankind by instilling the concepts of freedom and justice and socialism and equality and resisting oppression and these concepts are present in the majority of human ideologies and belief systems. Hence we see that a revolution started by one man - Husayn – along with a few helpers has changed now into a universal world revolution whose helpers number millions!

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The Author

Ayatollah al-Udhma Imam Muhammad Shirazi is undoubtedly the most eminent *Marje'* or Religious Authority of Muslim world. A charismatic leader who is known for his high moral values, modesty and spirituality, Imam Shirazi is a mentor and a source of aspiration to millions of Muslims; and the means of access to authentic knowledge and teachings of Islam. He has tirelessly devoted himself, and his entire life, to the cause of Islam and Muslims in particular, and to that of mankind in general. He has made extensive contributions in various fields of learning ranging from Jurisprudence and Theology to Government, Politics, Economics, Law, Sociology and Human Rights.

Born in Najaf, Iraq, in 1347 AH, 1928 AD, the young Shirazi continued his studies of different branches of learning under the guidance of various eminent scholars and specialists, as well as his father, the renowned *Marje'* of the time, Ayatollah al-Udhma Mirza Mahdi Shirazi. In the course of his training he showed an outstanding talent and a remarkable appetite for learning as well as a tireless commitment to his work and the cause he believed in. His extraordinary ability, and effort, earned him the recognition at the age of 25, by the *Maraje'* and scholars of the time, of being a *Mujtahid,* a fully qualified religious scholar and lawmaker in the sciences of Islamic jurisprudence and law. He was subsequently able to assume the office of the *Marje'* at the early age of 33 in 1380 AH, 1961.

Imam Shirazi is distinguished for his intellectual ability and holistic vision. He has written various specialized studies that are considered to be among the most important references in the relevant fields. He has enriched the world with his staggering contribution of more than 1000

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books, treatise and studies on various branches of learning. His works range from introductory works for the youth to literary and scientific masterpieces. Deeply rooted in the Holy Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet of Islam, his vision and theories cover such areas as Legislation, Management, Environment, Sociology, Theology, Philosophy, History Human Rights, Law and Islamic beliefs or doctrine. His work on Islamic Jurisprudence (the *al-Fiqh* series) for example constitutes 150 volumes, which run into more than 70,000 pages. Through his original thoughts and ideas he has championed the causes of issues such as the family, human rights, freedom of expression, political pluralism, non-violence, and such like.

From the outset of his adult and scholarly life, because of his total dedication to the Teachings of Islam, and because of his views on various issues, which are based on those teachings, he came under sustained pressure from the authorities in Iraq. During his stay in Iran he continued to call for Islamic issues such as freedom of expression, party political pluralism, peace and non-violence, which in turn brought about the wrath of the authorities there. His uncompromising stance on implementing the teachings of Islam in all aspects of government including such vital matters as leadership by consensus or *Showral-Foqaha'-al-Maraje'* (religious authorities' council of leadership) attracted the fury of those at the helm.

Having spent the entire of his adult life striving for the greater enlightenment of the Muslims and mankind, Imam Shirazi died in suspicious circumstances in the holy city of Qum, Iran, on Monday the 2nd Shawwal 1422 AH, 17th December 2001. More than half a million people attended his funeral procession on the following day.

Imam Shirazi believed in the fundamental and elementary nature of freedom in mankind. He used to call for freedom of expression, political plurality, debate and discussion, tolerance and forgiveness. He strongly believed in *Shura* and called for the establishment of the leadership council of religious authorities. He continuously called for the establishment of the universal Islamic government to encompass all the Muslim countries. These and other ideas are discussed in detail in his books of more than 1000.

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Teachings of Islam

www.ImamShirazi.com

A site dedicated to the cause of Islam, Muslims and Mankind

Islam aims to bring about prosperity to all mankind. One of the leading authorities on Islam today, Imam Muhammad Shirazi, calls upon all Muslims to adhere to the teachings of Islam in all domains in order to regain their former glory and the salvation of mankind. These teachings include:

- PEACE in every aspect.
- NON-VIOLENCE in all conducts.
- FREEDOM of expression, belief, etc.
- PLURALISM of political parties.
- CONSULTATIVE System of Leadership.
- The RE-CREATION of the single Muslim nation - without geographical borders, etc. between them, as stated by Allah:

  "This, your community is a single community and I am your Lord; so worship Me."

- The REVIVAL of Islamic brotherhood throughout this nation:

  "The believers are brothers."

- FREEDOM from all the man-made laws, and restrictions as the Qur'an states:

  "... and (Prophet Muhammad) releases them from their heavy burdens and from the shackles that were upon them."

You can email your queries to the website of Imam Shirazi at: **queries@ImamShirazi.com**

The Arabic site for the Teachings of Islam is **www.alshirazi.com**

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Other Publications by *fountain books*

www.fountainbooks.com

1. *What is Islam? Beliefs, principles and a way of life*

Few would dare to attempt to summarize the Islamic faith in a book of this size but this is the aim of the late Grand Ayatollah Muhammad al-Shirazi, one of the most eminent Islamic authorities of modern times. Eschewing complicated jargon and deliberately using succinct and lucid language within a "question and answer" format, he has sought to convey the richness and profound spirituality of the Islamic message in all its aspects to the widest possible audience. There are necessarily some Arabic and technical terms but these have been kept to a minimum. The late Sayyid Shirazi covers all the main aspects of Islam, from the fundamental beliefs such as the Oneness of God and His justice and prophethood to topics like ablutions, praying, fasting, and making the Hajj and also deals with such diverse subjects as Islamic law, economics, politics, the Islamic view of society, the issue of freedom in Islam, and so on. This is a book which will not only be useful for Muslims who want to find out more about their religion but also for non-Muslims who seek a concise introduction to what Islam is all about.

2. *Fundamentals of Islam*

In this book the author outlines the five fundamental principles of Islam, namely *Tawheed* (the Indivisible Oneness of God), *Adl* (Divine Justice), *Nubowwah* (Prophethood), *Imamah* (Leadership of mankind), and *Me'ad* (Resurrection). For each principle, the author presents a brief, and to the point, discussion on the significance of the issue concerned. The book could serve as a good introduction to Islamic beliefs.

3. *If Islam were to be established*

This book can serve as the Muslim's guide to the Islamic government. If an Islamist opposition group has a plan for an Islamic government, this book would help to check various aspects of the plan. In the absence of such a plan, this book would present one. To the non-Muslims, the book presents a glimpse of a typical Islamic system of government. The book would also serve as a yardstick for anyone to check the practices of any government that claims to have implemented an Islamic system of government.

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4. The Family

In this book the author highlights the problems he sees both in Islamic societies and in west societies today that arise from the phenomenon of unmarried young men and women, through to birth control and contraception. He surveys the idea of marriage in various religions and schools of thought, and discusses polygamy from the Islamic perspective. As well as being a call to the Muslim world to revert to the true teachings of Islam, this book can also be of use as an introduction to others who seek some answers to the social problems of today. This is because Islam provides detailed teachings that promise success in every area of human life on individual and societal levels, and furthermore the practicality and success of those teachings have been proven in the course of history.

5. The Qur'an: When was it compiled?

In this book the author addresses the issues of when the Holy Qur'an was compiled, on what and whose instructions was this task carried out, and who accomplished its compilation in the form that it is available today. In this work the author presents undisputable evidence as to address these crucial questions. Through historical, methodical and logical analyses, the author establishes how and when the compilation of the Holy Qur'an was achieved. In the latter half of the book the author cites many Prophetic traditions (*hadith*) on the significance of the learning and recitation of Holy Qur'an. It is a must read for every Muslim, and any non-Muslim who follows Islamic issues.

6. The Bible and Christianity: an Islamic view

In this work the author carries out a brief investigation into the Bible and presents his findings. They show that some of the most noble men, i.e. the Prophets, who have been chosen by God Almighty as His messengers to mankind, are accused in the Bible to have committed some of the most vile and immoral conducts known to man. Prophets are accused of deception, lying, fornication, rape, incest, murder, and the list goes on. Even God does not escape unscathed in the Bible . . . false characteristics are attributed to Him, or He is accused of making His messengers to commit foul and disgusting acts.

In the second part of this work the author presents some of the debates he had with the Christians who visited him in his residence in Karbala, Iraq. The debates concerned their impression of Islam and its doctrine as well as their own religious beliefs. In this presentation the author shows how he

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invited non-Muslims to Islam through calm but rational and intellectual debates with them. The book makes an interesting read, especially when the reader can see the simple arguments put forward in these debates.

7. War, Peace and Non-violence: An Islamic perspective

In this work the author addresses three controversial issues, which have come to be associated with Islam. Through his extensive knowledge of the teachings of Islam, the author presents the Islamic stand on war, peace and non-violence, as found in the traditions and teachings of the Prophet of Islam, which could serve as exemplary models for the Mankind. Detailed accounts of the traditions of Prophet in his dealings with his foes during war or peace times are presented in this book, which gives the reader a clear insight into the way and the basis upon which the Prophet of Islam used to conduct his affairs in this respect.

8. The Islamic System of Government

In this introductory book the author outlines the basic principles of a government based on the teachings of Islam. The author begins with the aim and objectives of the government according to Islam and the extent of its authority in that framework. He then addresses, from the Islamic viewpoint, the significance and fundamental nature of such issues as consultative system of government, judicial system, freedoms, party political pluralism, social justice, human rights, foreign policy, etc. The author also outlines the policies of a government on issues such as education, welfare, health, crime, services, etc. as well as such matters as the government's income, and authority.

9. Islamic Beliefs for All

In this book the author discusses the five fundamental principles of Islam. These principles are *Tawheed* or the Indivisible Oneness of God, *Adl* or Divine Justice, Prophethood, *Imamah* or the Leadership of mankind after the prophet, and Resurrection. What distinguish this book are the author's subtle approach in addressing the issues concerned and the simple examples given to illustrate the discussion. This authoritative work is not only important to Muslims, but it would also be of interest to those non-Muslims who seek to explore Islam and its doctrine. This easy to read book would be a valuable reference for Religious Education.

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10. The rights of prisoners according to Islamic teachings

In general, Islam considers imprisonment as a case of last resort in many circumstances, however, according to Islamic teachings there are only a few offences that would lead to imprisonment. Under non-Islamic system, of course the offender should be reprimanded, but any chastisement prescribed by Islamic teachings may only be implemented if all the relevant criteria and the preconditions prescribed are also met. If the criteria are not met, then the prescribed punishment may not be executed.

In this book the author addresses such issues as the fundamental nature of freedom, the rights of prisoner, and the harmful effects of imprisonment on the individual concerned as well as on society, and the kind of offences that would lead to imprisonment under an Islamic system. The author also cites a few cases to demonstrate the attitude the Islamic ruler should take towards offence; to try to find reasons to waive the punishments in any particular case. The author also addresses the issue of torture in general, and mental and physical ill treatment that is carried out under the guise of interrogation and extracting confession from a detainee or a suspect.

11. Aspects of the Political Theory of Imam Shirazi

Muhammad G. Ayub is a well-known Islamist political activist within the Iraqi circle who has established a long history of political struggle over the past three decades. He was attracted by the views of the Imam Muhammad Shirazi in the fields of social and political sciences. This prompted the author to write this book to introduce the reader to these views that have remained relatively unknown amongst Muslim activists and reformists. It covers such aspects on politics as freedom of expression, party-political pluralism and organisation, social justice, peace and non-violence, human rights, consultation system of government, etc.

12. The Guide to Hajj Rites

This handbook is a comprehensive but easy to follow book that guides the reader through all the stages of the Hajj pilgrimage. It addresses all aspects of the Hajj program and the rites that must be observed. It is a must for anyone who intends to go to the Hajj pilgrimage

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